THE PINCH OF PROSPERITY

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(Continued at back of book.)

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THE PINCH OF PROSPERITY

A STUDY OF SOME TWISTED LIVES

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

JOHN MURRAY

First Issue of this Edition 1925

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TO

MY BROTHER

GUY COURTENAY VACHELL

AND TO HIS WIFE

JOSEPHINE VACHELL

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

PREFATORY NOTE

WHEN this story appeared serially under the title of *The House of Quest*, the author was not aware that a novel, *The Mistress of Quest*, had already been published. A change of title became expedient, and after much hesitation *The Pinch of Prosperity* was chosen. Had this title (which is likely to arouse an expectation not easy to satisfy) suggested itself to the author before the book was written, or even while it was being written, the theme might have been handled differently. In the following pages the fringe merely of a great subject has been touched.

A friend remarked to the present writer that the pinch of prosperity was a ha'penny matter compared with the pinch of poverty. This is the general opinion. The pinching effects of prosperity upon character are less noticeable than those of poverty (inasmuch as poverty bears the scars which prosperity is fain to hide), but infinitely more far-reaching, for poverty is constrained to stay at home, while prosperity, whirling from pole to pole, touches and transmutes all things and persons.

To-day the English-speaking races on both sides of the Atlantic have achieved a prosperity so stupendous that imagination reels at it. Who will attempt to compute the moral effect upon the national character?

In this book prosperity and poverty are presented side by side, as they may be found in the book of Life. To many readers the transition from one to

the other may seem abrupt. Is it therefore inartistic? The writer confesses that he doesn't know.

One word more—the last. Since Flaubert wrote *Madame Bovary* there has been an ever-increasing tendency on the part of our writers of fiction to present one character standing in the limelight, supported by a shadowy stock company. In these pages a study of many lives, curiously interwoven, has been attempted. The colour of the book is derived not from one actor, but from all.

Beechwood, Totton,
February, 1903.

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THE

PINCH OF PROSPERITY

CHAPTER I

A WIFE FROM FAIRYLAND

ARTHUR WYNDQUEST wondered why his aunt's invitation had been so insistent. "You must" (the must was heavily underlined) "come to my theatricals. You will see something, my dear boy, quite out of the common." He smiled when he reflected that now he was a "dear boy," *persona grata* to the wife of the head of his House. Spelling the word with a capital, he smiled again not quite so pleasantly, for the doors of his house, when he needed shelter, had been slammed in his face. The son of a Guardsman who married a governess, he had been given to understand that he might be of the House of Quest, but not in it—except by invitation. "A man who asks for bread that he can earn," his father used to say, "deserves the stone. I asked my people for nothing; yet they pelted me." He also smiled when he mentioned the family, sensible that in marrying the woman he loved, the woman who loved him, he had gained more than the house could bestow. The late peer, Arthur's grandfather, refused to see Colonel Wyndquest and his wife, but he offered to send their only son to Harrow, and that offer, after many days of doubt, was accepted. Then, in due time, came an invitation to Quest,

largesse of shooting and hunting, an occasional "fiver" (money was scarce at Quest in those days), and plenty of advice of the kind that may be found in the letters of Lord Chesterfield to his son.

Arthur accepted these favours as a right, after the fashion of all healthy-minded youngsters. He spent his summer "exeat" at Wyndquest House, and drove to "Lords" behind the famous chestnut team. The grandfather liked the lad—he was not capable of love—because Arthur had a Quest face and a gift of repartee. Once he touched upon the difference between his heir, another grandson, and the penniless cadet.

"Remember, my buck," he said, not unkindly, "you and your cousin Anthony are very different persons."

"Well," retorted Arthur, "that is not his fault, grandfather—is it?"

The viscount chuckled, absolving the boy of impertinence, and when he told the story afterwards at his club ventured to predict an honourable future for one who had the brains as well as the good looks of an ancient and distinguished family.

Arthur was twenty when his grandfather died, and at the funeral he shed the few tears that fell about the grave of one not so black as his kith and kin painted him. His aunt held a filmy scrap of cambric to dry eyes, but her tears flowed afterwards, when the will was read, and it became known to the family that Lord Quest had left behind him an immense crop of mortgages. Fortunately the new viscountess had money of her own and executive ability, so in the course of a decade she succeeded in freeing the estates from debt; but in London society the Quests were counted poor.

Meantime, Arthur Wyndquest had lost his parents and the few thousands he inherited from them. Lady Quest professed great sympathy, assuring her poor Arthur that he would always have her prayers; but she advised him to leave England, and to seek abroad what he had lost at home. Arthur thanked her, and took his leave, convinced that the measure of

her kindness to him would vary according to the distance in miles between them. Lord Quest, who recognised in his wife qualities which raised her father to the peerage, had, you may be sure, his instructions.

"Your aunt," he said nervously to Arthur, "hopes you will follow her advice. You understand—eh?"

"I understand—perfectly."

Lord Quest adjusted his pince-nez.

"Quite so. I—er—wish that I could help you, but Chips" (this was Anthony Wyndquest, the son and heir) "is so extravagant, and I, as you know, am always *sans le sou*. To me a Dresden shepherdess is as irresistible as—ahem!" Arthur caught an allusion to the late viscount, who had been a connoisseur in articles quite as frail and beautiful as porcelain. "Which reminds me, my boy, that I must show you this. Not a word to your aunt!" He opened a cabinet and showed the nephew a small dish upon which some blue fish were disporting themselves in a green sea. "It's Palissy," he whispered. "A real gem! But—God bless me!—we were talking about your affairs." He blushed slightly as he put aside the dish. "Have you lost—er—everything?"

"I can pay my passage to the Antipodes."

"Dear, dear! Is it as bad as that?"

"It might be worse, uncle. You might have to pay it." Then seeing that Lord Quest winced, he added quickly: "I beg your pardon; I ought not to have said that."

His uncle had little money to spare, and that little—as he had implied—was spent (Lady Quest preferred the verb "squandered") upon china and enamels, but he could do a thing handsomely when he chose. Now without further speech, he moved to his writing-table and unlocked a drawer. Presently he handed Arthur a cheque. "This is between you and me," he whispered.

The cheque was for a hundred pounds. Arthur's face softened.

"My dear uncle, I cannot take your cheque. You

see I am not going to the Antipodes—only to Bloomsbury."

Lord Quest's fingers closed upon the crisp paper. "Where the deuce is Bloomsbury?"

"Bloomsbury," said Arthur, "is in the land of Yesterday. The family had a house there less than a hundred years ago."

"You are perfectly right. But, my dear fellow, you cannot live in Bloomsbury."

"I shall try," said Arthur grimly. "I am going to write for bread-and-butter. I have undertaken some work already. No; I have not told my aunt, but you can tell her—if you like, and it will be perfectly true—that I am leaving Mayfair for the Antipodes. I shall not walk to Grosvenor Square and she, I am sure, will never drive to Bloomsbury. Good-bye."

Lord Quest shook his nephew's hand without further protest. He could respect a will stronger than his own.

"Good-bye," he said. "My poor dear father always said you had the brains of the family. Better take that cheque. What! You won't accept a penny? Well, God bless you! and call on me when you can—at the club."

Wyndquest did not call upon Lord Quest at his club, nor upon other friends living in the West End. This, perhaps, was foolish, for some of these gentlemen might have given the struggling journalist what is technically known as a "boost." Indeed, editors of society papers, suspecting that Arthur was of kin to persons of rank, offered him double rates for facts (it is becoming dangerous to print fictions) concerning the great and illustrious. Wyndquest, however, refused to write a line about these sacred subjects of the Queen, losing thereby more than one patron. Within two years he was in desperate straits—almost starving. He had been forced to leave his boarding-house; he had sold or pawned the few articles of value he possessed; his clothes were shabby; and, worst of all, his confidence in himself was out at elbows. Nobody wanted his "stuff," and he was conscious that it was stuff, too stodgy for the palate of the town, yet not without

plums in it. "The knack will come," said a friend one day, "you are learning your trade—that's all." Sorry consolation to a hungry man! Finally he was constrained to accept work in a big printing establishment. Afterwards Wyndquest spoke of this period as one of incubation. The book which gave him reputation treated humorously and yet exhaustively of the sins and sorrows of the very poor. Wyndquest stood beneath a dark sky, but the darkest sky is luminous. He could discern good, and describe it as faithfully as he recorded evil. *The Samaritans* was written between the months of March and October. During that time he became a foreman in the printing works, and got in touch with every man, woman, and child under him. The impressions of each day, sorted and sifted by the sprites who slave when mortals sleep, were set down in the freshness of morning; and a famous critic said of the author that he had worked in an ugly field wet with dew.

When the book was finished, Arthur sent it to a great publishing house. With the manuscript was enclosed a letter.

"These are the first fruits of an experience which has seemed to me worth recording. Although I am unknown to you, I have been writing for some five years. Frankly, my pen failed to support me. I am now working in a printer's, but the work is poorly paid and exceedingly disagreeable. I mention these personal matters, because your decision in regard to the merits of my manuscript will colour, or discolour, my future life. Under these circumstances, may I ask for an early answer?"

Afterwards it transpired that the senior partner of the firm read this letter, and became interested in the writer. He told himself that he would dip into the manuscript before sending it on to a reader. So he carried home the package and bundled it into a drawer. That night his wife fell ill, and hung for weeks between life and death. Meantime *The Samaritans* lay forgotten. Arthur wrote to the firm, and was told that

no such manuscript had been received. He wrote again—and again. Manuscripts—he was politely informed—were duly numbered, docketed, and read. Mistakes were impossible. The head of the firm was in Italy nursing an invalid wife, and naturally knew nothing of the matter. And so on, and so forth.

Wyndquest had suffered much, but the loss of his book was the cruellest stroke since the death of his mother. It seemed that a part of himself had died. He knew that the book was good, and he knew that it could never be rewritten. I would pass over in decent silence the months that followed, but the despairs of a man's life are no more to be ignored than his triumphs. Wyndquest lived temperately. Vice had not tainted him. What our neighbours call *la nostalgie de la boue* was a disease against which he might consider himself immune. But for seven months he had been leading the double life: overstraining muscles and brains. And he was living in an atmosphere of drink. The fumes of beer and gin were on the lips of the young girls, upon the rags of the babies. Drink in Stepney is the elixir of life or death (the two are sometimes synonymous terms); Arthur told himself that drink would be poppy and mandragora; so he drank—deeply.

When the head of the publishing house returned to England he found the forgotten manuscript. He was distressed beyond measure at his carelessness, and his distress became poignant after he had read the book. Then followed a tedious quest for the author. Advertisements in the daily prints were unanswered, private inquiries ended in some sordid *cul-de-sac*. It became plain to the publisher that his forgetfulness had wrecked a soul; he learned that the man for whom he was searching had sunk to the depths. Finally he found him selling matches on Waterloo Bridge!

Pomeroy (the publisher) never did things by halves. He took Wyndquest to his own house, and poured oil into his wounds. Wyndquest said afterwards that he had never questioned the charity of the poor, but he

was confounded by the charity of the rich. An angel from heaven could not have been treated with more delicacy and consideration. He was clothed, he was fed, he was loved.

The book, when it appeared in the following spring, made a hit: the sales steadily increased till they reached a thousand a week. Moreover, it sold well in America (where copyright had been secured), and Wyndquest received a handsome offer for a series of lectures, which he accepted. Much to his surprise he discovered that he could talk with ease upon the subject near his heart. He had nothing of the *torrens dicendi copia*; but people listened to what he said. In the large American cities men sought him out, ministers, politicians, millionaires, all asking the same questions, questions in relation to the problem of succouring the poor. When he returned to England he told Pomeroy that he had made his plans.

"I shall write and speak about the very poor. I like such work. The hardest thing to encounter will be the curiosity of people who," he paused and finished the sentence quietly, "are *not* like you."

Wyndquest went back to Bloomsbury, but he held aloof from Wyndquest House, although he played piquet with Lord Quest at his club.

"You are coming to your aunt's theatricals?" asked Lord Quest.

"She says I must come, uncle."

"Yes, yes; don't disappoint her. She likes to have her own way. She is going to give you a surprise."

"Yes?"

"I think I shall prepare you. Two young ladies are stopping with us—Americans."

"I know," said Wyndquest. He did not add that this knowledge had kept him out of Grosvenor Square. It seemed to him that Lady Quest had done ill in receiving as "paying guests" two American heiresses. Others did it, of course, but not the Wyndquests.

"Chips spends so much money," faltered the peer. "I know how you feel, my boy; but Chips suggested it. I

suppose he will marry one of them when—when he can tell 'em apart."

"Eh?"

"My boy, that is the surprise. They are twins. I can't tell one from t'other! And the witches take a dev'lish pleasure in confounding the confusion that exists. Chips says he'll marry either, and your aunt says you are to have the other."

Wyndquest laughed.

"It is no joke, Arthur. Anthony must marry money and health and beauty, and these Californians have all three. And why shouldn't you marry—eh?"

"And why should I?" said Wyndquest. "I am happy and contented as I am."

Upon the night of his aunt's party he found in the hall of Wyndquest House an American friend, Mrs. Cornelius Sparling, better known on two continents as Mrs. Corny, a lady of many dollars and many friends.

"You here?" said Wyndquest.

"Why not? Give me your arm, and we will try to push through this mob. I wouldn't miss the first piece for anything. They say that she—they—the two, you know, who play as one, are stunning."

"What do you mean?"

"I am speaking of 'The Wife from Fairyland.' The title-*rôle* is played by these twins whom——"

"I have not met. Please describe them."

"I never describe persons or places. The imagination is so easily tainted. You can judge for yourself in ten minutes. Confess, now, you are prejudiced against them, because they are here? Ah! Hush! Here is your aunt. How well she wears."

Lady Quest stood at the head of the stairs while the crowd filed by. Arthur marked her smiles, carefully graduated according to the Mayfair scale, and the inflection of her voice.

"Velvety, isn't it?" whispered Mrs. Corny. "This is the cleverest thing she has done. The twins are being alked about. Ah! your aunt is signalling to you."

Wyndquest, however, refused to leave Mrs. Corny. He had met her in New York, and they had shaken hands over a common interest in their fellow-creatures. Moreover, the lady was never lukewarm in her likes or dislikes. And you could resume acquaintance where it left off. The people with whom one has to begin all over again are so tiresome.

As they drew nearer, Arthur saw that his aunt was not wearing well. Now and again her heavy lids fell over the dull blue eyes, a symptom of extreme fatigue; and her voice, beneath its velvety modulations, was the voice of a weary and careworn woman. Wyndquest disliked his aunt, but to-night, for the first time in his life, he pitied her. The simulated warmth of her greeting provoked a response which brought a faint flush to her cheeks.

"Remember, my dearest boy, I particularly want to see you after supper. Don't fail me."

They passed on into the big double drawing-rooms, and sat down as the son of the house passed by. Anthony was large, ruddy, clear-eyed, and clean-limbed. One might be sure that he had an admirable circulation and the digestion of an ostrich. He described himself as "useful" at all games, and had the reputation of being a hard man to hounds.

"Anthony is a good fellow," murmured Wyndquest.

Mrs. Corny winked.

"Chips is a sad scamp," she said, "but perhaps his wife from fairyland will reclaim him."

The curtain rose, revealing a rustic interior. Charm would be an empty word were it subject to analysis. In the "Wife from Fairyland" the charm is as elusive as it is simple. The wife is played by two young girls, exactly alike, who by this likeness confuse and confound the swain, who believes them to be one. Of course, the illusion is instantly dispelled if a difference be detected. Upon this occasion the twins were so perfect—the one was so absolutely the counterfeit presentment fo the other—that the audience were amazed. When the curtain fell, and the pair stood hand in hand before it,

a note of exclamation rippled from mouth to mouth, followed by volleys of applause. The girls never moved; courting the scrutiny of the world, they had succeeded in amusing and exciting. Wyndquest turned to Mrs. Corny.

"They are as like as—as two daisies," he said.

"Daisies! Try again."

"As two violins."

"That is better. No doubt there is a difference in tone; but to find it you will have to play on each instrument; eh? Ah! they have vanished!"

In the interlude before the last piece, a French farce, Anthony Wyndquest came back.

"The twins want to meet you," he said in Arthur's ear. "Daphne has read your book, and means to chuck some of her dollars into Stepney. Hurry up!"

Mrs. Corny was beckoning to another man, so Arthur followed his cousin out of the drawing-room and into Lady Quest's boudoir. When the genial Chips said: "They are witches, aren't they?" he nodded, and replied: "You have hit the word."

The sisters were standing together surrounded by men. Above the babel of laughter and compliment rose the voice of Chips.

"Now, you fellows, make way! Daphne, Bridget, let me introduce my cousin Arthur."

The twins looked at the author of *The Samaritans* with frank interest and curiosity. Despite a family resemblance Arthur afforded a striking contrast to Anthony. His face, rather pale, was marked by lines of thought; his figure, tall and spare, indicated energy and endurance rather than great muscular strength. He had the air of one who had fought hard and received scars. Imagination could not picture him as fighting with one smaller or weaker than himself.

"We are so glad to meet you," said Bridget, in a voice free from accent, yet quite un-English. "Will you take me downstairs and get me a cup of coffee?"

Alone with him, however, she seemed shy; and Wyndquest was tongue-tied. He would have liked to

have said something complimentary about the play, but could not fit words to his ideas. Meantime he looked at her as she sipped her coffee.

"You do not talk," she said softly.

The glance she flung him was a lure; but the tone was serious, though provocative.

"I do not talk—much," he answered; "but I should like to talk with you."

"Ah! Thank you for the 'with.' Being talked to or talked at is rather trying. When will you come and talk *with* me?"

He hesitated.

"Why have you not come before? We have been here a month—five weeks."

"I suppose Anthony Wyndquest comes——"

"Not too often; we like him immensely. He is so friendly. You are a formal person."

"No, no!"

"We like formality; it amuses us."

Her frequent use of the plural struck him as odd.

"You and your sister are indeed twins," he observed. "Would it be indiscreet to ask if the resemblance is more than skin deep?"

"Not at all. Therein lies the difference between English and American girls. You can ask *us* anything."

"Have you the same tastes about books, for instance, and——"

"People," she took him up with a smile. "Oh no; Daphne likes——Well, she will tell you her likes and dislikes. And I——if you talk with me you will find them out for yourself, won't you? There is polo tomorrow at Hurlingham. Mr. Chips drives us down. Will you come?"

"Yes."

She laid her hand upon his sleeve. The gesture was full of grace and youthfulness. "I am sure we shall be friends," she added.

CHAPTER II

PRETTY PARSLOW

HE had no opportunity of speaking again to her or to Daphne, who was the elder by twenty minutes, but he did not forget his promise to Lady Quest. Supper had smoothed his aunt's softly tinted face, and lent a sparkle to her tired eyes. The presence of a Prince of the Blood has a stimulating effect upon some ladies of fashion, and to many an ambassador acts as a mild tonic. Lady Quest was fortified by Royalty, Diplomacy, and Pommery—not to mention quails *à la* Lucullus and other delicacies. Wyndquest congratulated her upon a successful entertainment.

"I think the Duke was pleased," she murmured. "He praised the *macédoine*, and said it was not over-frozen. Fruit easily loses its flavour. Now, what is it I wish to speak to you about?"

Arthur looked impassive. He was familiar with his aunt's little ways, and amused by them. She conveyed the impression that what she had to communicate was of no importance.

"Oh yes; it is about Daphne Romayne, the foolish child. Did Daphne speak to you about Stepney?"

"No; Chips said something about her chucking dollars into Stepney."

"Anthony uses dreadful English, but it is—expressive. Yes; the child has read that delightful book of yours—I never can remember the name of it—and it has affected her—as, indeed, it affected *me*—profoundly."

"If she be charitably inclined, I——"

"My dearest boy, charity begins at home. Why should she, an American, spend her money in Stepney?"

"I suppose it is lawful to spend it in Grosvenor Square."

"I hoped you would stand by us. Anthony—you will be discreet I know—wants to marry Daphne."

"Why not Bridget?"

"What questions you ask! He fancies Daphne, and she likes him. But you must wean her mind from Stepney."

Wyndquest looked round at the faded splendours of the room, the shabby brocades, the worn carpets, the tarnished gilding, and, last of all, at the tired eyes in the worldly face so close to his.

"I daresay," he replied, "that this is only a maid's whim; it will pass when—when she becomes engaged to Chips. For my part, if she speaks on the subject I shall advise her to make haste slowly. Money must not be chucked even into Stepney. But," his eyes brightened, "it is pleasant, isn't it, to think of this pretty girl, with so much to occupy her thoughts, giving her sympathy and wishing to give her money to others? You don't meet that sort of young woman every day."

Lady Quest looked down her aquiline nose and coughed.

"I shall count on you," she said. "I hear you are joining our party to-morrow. Come to luncheon if you can. And, of course, if Anthony marries Daphne, there will be Bridget left for some one else. Your uncle and I would rejoice to see *you* comfortably settled. I am anxious that Anthony should marry the girl he loves, who happens to be an heiress. He has such fine feelings that I really feared the money—they own the richest gold mine in California—would prove a bar. But his sense has—er—vanquished his—er——"

"Sensibilities."

"Quite so. I wish that I had your diction, my dearest Arthur."

Wyndquest bade his aunt good-night, and walked home through the empty silent streets which lie between Bloomsbury and Grosvenor Square. He loved London with that intelligent affection which sees below the surface, whether it be ugly or beautiful. To him the

streets were not stony-hearted, although he had wandered through them starving and despairing. But in the glare of day, in the turmoil of a roaring thoroughfare, he found London importunate and incoherent. When he stood in the Poultry at high noon, he felt like a child in a three-ring circus. At night and in the early morning he could see and understand. To many the charm of London lies in its movement, its kaleidoscopic colours, its contrasts, but to those who are endowed with feeling and imagination, London as pageant and spectacle soon becomes tiresome. If you want to examine a complicated machine, you must wait till the whirling wheels are still.

As he turned into Mecklenburgh Square a woman confronted him.

"Lor'," she said sharply, "I thought you was never coming."

"Why, Pretty?" he exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here at this time of night?"

He glanced with concern at her thin face and shoulders.

"Waiting for yer," she answered, shivering.

"How long?"

"Since ten."

"Good Heavens! Nearly four hours. Max is worse?"

"Yes, he's dying; and mother's drunk."

"You must have a glass of wine," said Wyndquest. He opened the door with his latchkey, and waited for the girl to pass by, but she hung back, protesting: "I ain't fit; I ain't fit."

Wyndquest pulled her across the threshold, and into a room on the right, where a lamp was burning. By its light it was easy to see why Miss Ellen Mary Parslow was called "Pretty" by those who had the pleasure of her acquaintance. Her clothes, it is true, were little better than clean rags, her hair was untidy, her features were neither delicate nor well cut; and yet the face, as a whole, was charming by virtue of a pair of hazel eyes, and a wide mouth filled with white even teeth.

Wyndquest lit the gas and unlocked a cellaret, while Pretty balanced herself upon one leg. The fact that she had come on an errand of life and death in no way impaired her enjoyment of the present. She stared at the prints upon the walls, at the Staffordshire figures upon the oak mantelshelf, at the sofa with its big cushions, at the books, and, lastly, at the cut-glass chandelier—a relic of Georgian splendour which did not belong to Arthur. Gazing at this glittering object, she forgot her society manners, and began to swear. When her host handed her the glass of wine she blinked at him, and, looking up once more, said sharply:

"Di'monds?"

"Pizon?" repeated Wyndquest, who was thinking of more important matters. "No; it's sound port, and will warm the cockles of your heart."

"I said di'monds," repeated Pretty. "Is them di'monds?"

"Common glass, Pretty."

She shook her head incredulously before swallowing the wine. She had seen common glass, plenty of it, and preferred pewter.

"And you leave *this*," she indicated the simple furnishings with a not ungraceful kick, "to come and see us!"

"Drink your wine, Pretty. I am going to slip into other clothes."

Miss Parslow drank her wine and smacked her lips.

"Blime me, if I understand 'im," she muttered, with one eye on the chandelier and the other on the door, which had just closed behind Wyndquest. "'E trusts me too. Lor'! Couldn't I 'elp myself. See, Satan, see!" she hovered about a small miniature set with paste, clawing at it like a kitten, and purring with delight. "See, Satan, see. Oh no, old feller. No, no; not to-night."

This performance came to an abrupt end, as the door opened, and Wyndquest's head appeared.

"Don't make such a row," he growled. "You'll wake the whole square."

Pretty assumed her stork-like attitude ; then, catching sight of a mirror, she began to dance—noiselessly and gracefully, displaying wonderful powers as a kicker and a leg delicately modelled. When she caught her own eye in the mirror, she winked and kissed the tips of her fingers, throwing the kisses to right and left after the fashion of professionals. Pretty might be cold ; she was often hungry ; but certainly she had an amazing capacity for enjoyment. Suddenly she remembered the dying lodger, and sank in a crumpled heap to the floor.

"'Ow could I, 'ow could I?" she groaned. "'Im dyin' and me dancin'. Orful—ain't it?" She screwed up her face in comical perplexity. "Yus, Ellen Mary Parslow, yer a wrong 'un. Yer go so easy clean off yer nut."

When Wyndquest came back, she picked herself up, shook herself, and followed her host into the square, nibbling the biscuits he had given her. The pair walked briskly, the man in front, the girl behind, till they entered Southampton Row ; then Wyndquest looked round.

"Did Max give you my address?"

"Yus."

"I told him to send," murmured Arthur. "Poor fellow!"

"'E's 'ad 'is innings," remarked Pretty philosophically. "The best of everythink."

"And the worst," added Wyndquest.

"We was talkin', 'im and me, this afternoon. 'Pretty,' he sez, 'I've had a short life and a merry one.' Them wos 'is words—identical. 'Well,' I sez, 'short it may 'ave been, but it ain't been merry since you come to our street!'"

Wyndquest made no reply. He was thinking of Pretty, not of the man to whose death-bed he supposed he was hastening. This girl had waited four hours on a bitter night (May nights are often bitter) ; she must have been chilled to the marrow ; the dying man was not of kin to her—a stranger, indeed ; and yet

no complaint had leaked from her lips. It touched him also that she should have taken for granted that he (Wyndquest) would wait upon the stranger. This blind faith in the kindness and charity of others was certainly of the sort that has been given free to babes and withheld from the wise.

"You are a good girl, Pretty," he said suddenly.

"Garn!" was Miss Parslow's reply. "I ain't good, and don't want to be neither. I sy," she added confidentially, "you was bad yourself once, wasn't yer?"

"Yes," said Wyndquest. His story had become public property. The people of Lambeth, and Stepney, and Southwark, who crowded to his lectures, came to hear the man who had sold matches on Waterloo Bridge.

"I ain't good," observed Miss Parslow. "I'd like to be on the booze all the time, as mother is, only it gives me such an orful 'ead. I don't fight, and I don't swear as I did, but if you think I turned over a new leaf and took to nursin' the sick ter please the Lord, it's precious little you know abaht it."

"Why did you do it?" asked Wyndquest indiscreetly.

In the dark the girl's face became hot and flushed, but she was too ingenuous to lie.

"I did it ter please you."

"It does please me, Pretty; I am much obliged to you. Here we are."

As he climbed the rickety stairs he heard a woman singing, and recognised the voice of Mrs. Parslow. To this lady wine and song were represented by sweetened gin and certain hymns she had learned as a child in the small Hampshire village where she had been born. Her *répertoire* was extensive, her selections appropriate. "Awake, my soul!" was now being sung with feeling and power.

"'E's not dead yet," whispered Pretty. "Mother never sings when there's a corpse in the 'ouse."

> Redeem thy mis-spent time that's past,
> And live this day as if thy last.

"That's mother's fav'rite," observed Miss Parslow. "'E's taken a turn for the better, 'e 'as."

This proved true. Mrs. Parslow attempted to rise when Wyndquest entered the room, and very nearly fell on her face.

"Don't be too perlite," remarked the daughter. "Yer may 'urt yerself."

"I'm feelin' dreadful low," said the mother thickly. "I don't think you'll 'ave me long, Ellun."

Wyndquest had walked to the bed, whereon a young man was lying. His eyes were wide open and glassy; the pupils a mere pin's point in size. Recognising his visitor, a grin twisted his mouth—an expression indicating surprise grappling with gratitude. Wyndquest nodded, and laid a finger upon the patient's wrist.

"I'm going ter die, I am," wailed the woman in the corner.

"Oh, reelly! we've 'eard that before, mother. No, yer don't!" (Mrs. Parslow had aimed a vicious kick at her daughter's ankle.) "Do yer think 'e's a-going ter die?" she whispered.

"'E's not going ter be so obligin'," snapped the old woman. "Seemingly—'e's mended since you left. What kep' yer?" she added suspiciously. "I don't 'old with gals a-rompin' about the streets. Yer ain't been up to any larks?"

"No," said Pretty sullenly. "I waited fer 'im; and nearly froze to death."

"I was born respectable and 'ave live respectable," continued Mrs. Parslow, raising her voice so that Wyndquest might not miss one precious word. "And I 'ope you'll mind that, Ellun, and be'ave yerself."

Wyndquest came forward.

"I think, Pretty, you had better take your mother to her room. She can come back when I want her. Do you go to bed at once."

Hearing these words, and knowing them (by experience) to be an ultimatum, Mrs. Parslow was suddenly taken with faintness and inertia, proof even against Pretty's pinches and kicks. Finally, to get rid of her,

Wyndquest administered a small dose of brandy, and, taking her by the arm, pulled her, protesting tearfully, to the door, Pretty pushing behind; and so, not without difficulty, Mrs. Parslow was conducted to her own apartment.

Wyndquest had rescued the forlorn creature to whom the reader must now be introduced out of a den in Limehouse, and had given him special care and attention, knowing that the reclaiming of an opium fiend was likely to prove a dismal failure. Wyndquest was aware, with the humility of experience, that in such cases nothing short of unremitting individual effort will avail. And so he had fought tooth and nail for this stranger's life and reason; now, when he least expected it, there seemed to be a change for the better.

The man was not only alive, but reasonable.

"I sent for you," he said, as soon as he found himself alone with Arthur, "because I thought I was going. The sinking came on about four; it was awful. The doctor had given Pretty some opium pills, and I had my syringe, but I just swore to myself that I'd go without that cursed drug, even if it killed me. And I wouldn't let the girl fetch parson or doctor."

The words dripped, so to speak, from his pallid lips. Now his voice began to quiver with emotion.

"That doctor is as cold as the Rocky Mountains. He doesn't care whether I live or not. I'm only an American. In his heart he hopes I shall die, because he told Pretty that I must. He wants to prove himself a prophet at my expense; I'll fool him you'll see. And the curate is nearly as bad. He doesn't believe in my spiritual recovery. I can see his opinion of me in his eye, and," he laughed harshly, "I wonder it doesn't destroy his sight. But you're different, old chap. Gad! you've been there yourself, and understand. Yes, I made certain I was booked through, and I wanted you to see me off. It was good of you to come at this hour. But now I mean to live. That jackanapes told me that if I could master the drug fairly and squarely I should live. He leered at me. I swear he did. And that leer

nerved me when the pains of hell got hold of me. I fought and conquered, and the old girl sang her hymns."

"Perhaps you could sleep a bit now."

"I believe I can sleep," said Max. "Mrs. Parslow will sit here if you ask her."

"I know my dooty," murmured that lady when she was summoned. "And it took two to budge me from it just now, bad as I am! Yus, Ellun is asleep. That child 'd sleep when 'er own mother was dying. Yus, I'll watch—and pray."

"No hymns," said Wyndquest, "It is doubtful whether you will wake your soul by singing to it at three in the morning, but you may wake some of your neighbours' bodies. Good-night. Good-night, Max. I'll drop in again to-morrow."

CHAPTER III

"OR WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?"

THE twins took delight in wearing similar clothes, but a point of difference always distinguished one from the other. Upon the day following Lady Quest's party they were wearing bangles of thin gold wire, upon each of which sparkled an initial in brilliants. Daphne looked at the 'D' upon her bangle and laughed.

"I want to play a joke on Chips," she said. "He thinks he can tell us apart. Give me your bangle and take mine. Chips, you will see, will be fooled. I shall read the Riot Act in your name. He must be made to come off his perch."

Bridget took the bangle and slipped it on to her wrist.

"Daphne," she said softly, "do you care for Anthony Wyndquest?" Daphne blushed.

"I don't know," she laughed nervously, "I — I don't know. He certainly does like me. I have the greatest difficulty in keeping him off—off the grass. He is the sort who—who doesn't need encouragement. So far he has had none from me, and perhaps that is why he is so—so keen. And I've no secrets from you, so I'll whisper in your ear that I should like to be a peeress some day, but not unless my peer was a man who could be loved for himself."

The gong summoned them to luncheon. In the drawing-room were Arthur and Anthony, and the latter —as Daphne had foreseen—after a quick glance at the bangles, annexed the twin who was labelled 'D.' Lord Quest joined the party in the dining-room.

"Glad to see you, Arthur," he remarked. "Can't give you as good a glass of sherry as we get at the club, but, as a matter of fact, your aunt——"

"Alfred!"

"My dear?"

"We are not interested in sherry!"

"That is why she buys—Marsala," murmured the peer.

"Have some beer, Arthur. I always drink beer in this house," said Chips. "It's safer. But last night the 'fizz' was ripping."

The twins stared at their plates. They knew who had paid for the champagne. Lord Quest chuckled. Lady Quest looked down her nose. The Californians, when they first came to Wyndquest House, had been shown (by the joyous Chips) a certain stain on the old-fashioned flock paper. "My grandfather, you know, threw a suet puddin' at my grandmother and just missed her," explained the heir. "The governor, poor old chap, hasn't the nerve, but he'd like to do it. It's as well to mention these little things," he continued, "because you are going to live in this house, where the women have always been a handful. And so, if you do find the governor getting more than he deserves, take his side like dears."

Driving down to Hurlingham, Arthur Wyndquest found himself beside the twin he believed to be Bridget, but the real Bridget, with the deceiving bangle on her wrist, was on the box-seat, next to the hoodwinked Chips. Presently Daphne marked a certain perplexity in Arthur's face and said:

"Confess that you cannot tell us apart?"

"Give me time," he answered. I have not yet spoken to your sister."

She smiled, pleased that she had hoaxed him so easily. Then she began to ask innumerable questions: fluttering from topic to topic, but shunning those of a dark complexion. Arthur told himself that the Bridget of the day sparkled brightly; the Bridget of the night had shone with a somewhat softer radiance.

After the polo match, the real Bridget and he wandered under the trees and sat down. Arthur stared at the 'D' on the bangle, reflecting that Chips had chosen wisely. Intuitively he preferred this twin to the other.

"Your sister asked me just now if I could tell you two apart," he said abruptly. "I can't; but I can *feel* a difference. Miss Bridget is lighter than you."

Bridget purposely misunderstood him.

"I can assure you," she replied gravely, "that Bridget and I weigh the same to a pound."

"Chips tells me you are interested in Stepney."

Her pensive face brightened.

"Oh yes," she said eagerly. "And I'm so anxious to hear something from you," the pronoun was delicately emphasised, "about your work there."

"My work?" He hesitated, embarrassed. Bridget liked him the better because he was unwilling to talk of himself.

"Yes," she said softly, "your work. You know all about the East End, don't you?"

"I have touched the fringe."

"You have touched hearts, Mr. Wyndquest. How do you do it? What brings rich and poor together?"

"A common danger," he replied slowly. "That is one of the blessings of war."

"Ah, I see. We must all fight."

"Yes. Make that plain, and it is a bond."

Bridget began to understand why this man had influence over his fellows. Not intellect, nor eloquence, but feeling, scaled the walls which hide one soul from another. His voice softened because he was thinking of Bridget, and the strife from which she was no more exempt than any hussy of the gutter. And, knowing this, the woman in her cried out:

"What am I to do?"

The direct question startled him. He remembered what Chips had said.

"Do not *chuck* your money into Stepney. Dollars chucked at the poor bruise the heads on whom they fall.

If you want to throw money about, throw nothing heavier than a threepenny bit."

"But I don't want to throw money about," she said quickly. "I realise as strongly as—as you do, that it is an easy thing for a rich woman to sign cheques; I am not going to stop there, I want to give more than that: itme, trouble, sympathy, and—and I hope to profit by your experience, to borrow from you freely."

The girl's sincerity was obvious.

"It is as serious as that?"

"Why should you doubt me?"

His eyes wandered from the tip of her patent leather boot to the gay gown above, lingered upon the pearls at her throat, and the face above them, and finally settled upon her hat with a glance of such concern that Bridget raised her hands to see if by any mischance the thing was pinned on askew. Man and maid laughed.

"Perhaps," said Wyndquest, "you are different from the others."

"The others?" she repeated. "Of course dozens of young women have offered you their cheque books and —and their services."

"No," he replied, "not one."

"Will you accept my services?"

"Have I the right to refuse them?"

"You are content with your work?"

"Yes."

"But you ought to be in Parliament."

He shook his head, smiling.

"The world says you are doing on a small scale what might be done on a large one. You work with individuals, I am told. Is it not as easy to move thousands as units?"

"I cannot answer that question, Miss Romayne. And I have never regarded myself as a professional. My friends and I are amateurs."

"Who are your friends?"

"That man sitting over there is one."

"What, Lord Wincanton? The man who shoots?"

"Yes. The little chap who played number two to-day is another, Puggy Slaney."

"Captain Slaney? You surprise me. That sporty little man."

"Why not? The men who are keen are the men we want. Puggy was at Harrow with me, and he asked me to take him round. I took him round once—twice; now he goes by himself. He is even more popular in Stepney than he is at Hurlingham."

"How good of him," exclaimed Bridget, seeing the polo-player in a halo.

"How good for him," amended Wyndquest.

"You have made charity popular," said Bridget.

The adjective pricked Wyndquest; it had been used by some Gamaliels of science and religion, and always in a disparaging tone. The "popularising" of charity was a detestable phrase. He explained this to Bridget, not without heat, and then his sense of humour came to the rescue.

"After all," he concluded, "that is what I am trying to do. Why should I be ashamed of it? Somehow the 'popularising' of anything seems to cheapen it, doesn't it?"

"To an English eye, yes," replied Bridget. "Tell me, please—Lord Wincanton and Captain Slaney were influenced by your book?"

"They read it."

"I read it," said Bridget, dropping her voice, "I read it and re-read it. Every line of it goes to the heart, to the place whence it came. Its cleverness is nothing—nothing compared to the humanity of it, the sympathy, the insight! To think that it has stirred thousands and thousands. Oh, it was a great thing indeed to have written such a book. Whatever happens, you have done that."

Her ardour quickened his pulses. No English girl would have suffered herself to speak enthusiastically at such a time, in such a place, and upon so short an acquaintance.

"Thank you," he murmured; "thank you very much."

"You were inspired," the girl continued dreamily, letting her thoughts flow back to certain passages. "Some kind spirit guided your pen."

"I have not spoken of it to others," Bridget glanced at him in astonishment, for his voice was harsh and troubled, "but I sometimes feel that the book is not my own, that some spirit—perhaps my dear mother—came to me, and, as you say, guided my pen. I could not write such a book again; what I have written since is different, and not nearly as good. I wonder why I have told you this."

"I am glad you told me, Mr. Wyndquest. Perhaps your power will come back."

When a man like Wyndquest, to whom reticence has become a habit, suddenly breaks down the barriers that have dammed speech, there is danger of a flood.

"No. After my book was written I fell to the depths. And I dare not complain," he added fiercely. "A man must give something in exchange for his soul."

She put out her hand instinctively, and he grasped it. Then he let it fall, for it seemed to him that Bridget had laughed—lightly, carelessly, as one laughs at a clever bit of comedy. A second later he saw that her sister and Anthony Wyndquest were standing close to them. The sister had laughed.

"Swearing eternal friendship," said Anthony.

"Yes," said Wyndquest.

"Bridget and I have been quarrelling," said Anthony.

At the sound of her name applied to her twin, Bridget remembered with dismay that she had in a sense obtained Arthur's confidence under false pretences. She was about to make confession when Daphne spoke:

"Mr. Chips," said she, "does not give the facts. I am quite calm; he is angry because I have been taking him to task. What is the use of being friends with a person if you can't say disagreeable things to him? I only quoted Voltaire. I told him he had aimed at nothing and hit the mark."

Anthony riposted, looking at Bridget: "I shall soon know you twins apart, because one is so much *kinder*

than the other." And Arthur, seeing the pupils of the other's eyes suddenly dilate and contract, reflected that in this case his cousin had hit the mark. One sister was kinder than the other. It was the difference in the tone of the two violins.

"We shall leave you," continued Daphne, taking her sister's arm. "No; don't come with us, we are sufficient unto ourselves. Lady Quest wishes to present a bishop, so we must try to wean our minds from what is of the earth earthy. I am thinking of you, Mr. Chips."

"And I am thinking of you, Miss Bridget Romayne. I am dwelling with rapture upon the hope that you will not sit beside me on the drive home."

He turned to speak to his cousin, as the sisters moved across the lawn towards the pink parasol which shaded Lady Quest's softly tinted face from the afternoon sun.

"Now you must swear," said Daphne, "that you will never give me away. Never, never, never!"

"But——"

"I enjoyed myself immensely with Chips; and I really made him mad. It was rough on you; but you told me you did not care for him, didn't you? So I laid on the lash. I made him squirm. Oh, these Englishmen! They expect women to gr-r-rovel before them. When you give them the ell, they want the inch too. Chips thinks that when he nods the spheres are shaken."

"Oh no; he doesn't," protested Bridget. "I don't admire Anthony Wyndquest, but he is not vain nor conceited."

"He is, he is; but less than he was an hour ago. I took the starch out of him, I can tell you. How did you get on with the genius? I like *him* immensely."

"We did not quarrel," murmured Bridget; "but, Daphne, I must tell him of the trick we played. I—I—must—I——"

She began to stammer, and then stood still, blushing. She could not betray Wyndquest's confidence, and her sister's stare was disconcerting. As she hesitated, her quick wits apprehended the delicacy of the situation. A man had given her a glimpse of his soul. In return,

she was about to tell him that she had been fooling with him.

"You mustn't," said Daphne; "I am not joking. I said more than I intended to Chips. He would never forgive me—if he knew. You are horribly honest, darling. I suppose you get that from Papa. But you must not compromise—me."

"Very well," she sighed. "Have your own way. I have a feeling that we've been playing with fire."

Her feeling would have been fortified had she overheard what Anthony was saying to his cousin.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, as the twins strolled away, "I have had a slating. And do you know, old chap, I never liked Bridget so much before. But I wouldn't let her find that out. She thought I was boilin', and really I was takin' my gruel and enjoying it; lickin' the spoon—eh? I have been awfully slack, and she has put some ginger into me. 'Pon my soul, Bridget is the pick of the pair. Bridget sees through me; she does indeed. I shall have to mend my ways. Between ourselves, Arthur, the mater has set her heart upon my marryin' one of 'em, and I want the best if I can get her, which is no certainty."

Men liked Chips—so they said—because his mind was as clear as his skin. He had the faults and the virtues of a peer's son; but not the least of his merits was an honest affection for Arthur. It is true that when Arthur fell upon evil days, Anthony made no sustained effort to find him and help him; his cousin had drifted out of society; he would turn up, as he put it, some day, the same old Arthur, a bit queer, but one of the best. When Arthur did turn up, when his story became the talk of the town, Anthony, figuratively speaking, scourged himself. The men of his regiment (he was in the Grenadiers) liked him none the less because he wore his heart upon his sleeve.

He talked on, and Arthur listened attentively, because Bridget was being exalted at the expense of Daphne. If first impressions had any value, and he believed they had, the sister who had looked into his eyes with such

sympathy and intelligence was the finer spirit of the two. He had supposed, from what his aunt had said, that she was set apart for Anthony; he was gladder than he knew to find the young man interested in the other, to hear that this other was able to quicken clay from which good bricks might yet be made. After Chips had left him, he sauntered up and down under the trees, thinking of the sweet attraction of Jack for Jill and of Jill for Jack.

Presently Mrs. Corny appeared, accompanied by a callow youth, who was listening to her quips in a vain hope of repeating them later—as his own. Wyndquest raised his hat. He remembered that this clever and kindly woman knew the history of the twins, and thought he would like to hear it. This determination was so plain on his face that the youth fled.

"Why does he fly?" said Mrs. Corny. "He tells me that he likes riddles. He should have stayed to hear me propound one. Why are you here?"

"To ask you some questions."

"In asking your questions you answer mine. The amazing twins are here; you want to pump me in regard to them."

"I do," said Arthur. "You knew Godfrey Romayne, the father?"

"Yes; he married a widow."

"And?"

"Don't hurry me! A Creole, a fair Creole, from New Orleans, with not enough brains to cover the point of a needle. She gave the twins her lapis-lazuli eyes, her wonderful blonde hair, and, I suspect, a dash of moral weakness. The woman could not say 'no.' The twins, you may retort, have said 'no' many times since they came to Grosvenor Square, but have they said 'no' in answer to a question to which their hearts whispered 'yes'? I think not. Don't look cross! I admire the twins, but they have not yet been to the wash. If they found themselves in hot water they might shrink. You don't believe it? Ah, you are a man! Well, Mrs. Romayne was one of those mothers who

seem to have a merely animal love of their babies, forsaking them as they grow older, and—and," Mrs. Corny's eyes twinkled, "and reflect too faithfully their mother's vanity and selfishness."

"Ah!" exclaimed Wyndquest. He was interested, unable as yet to analyse his emotions, but sensible that in some mysterious fashion the lives of the Romaynes and of himself were being interwoven. A man of imagination, he had clothed with flesh the bones of the story; he could picture this soft-eyed, soft-voiced, sensuous creature, the woman who could not say "no."

"Godfrey Romayne soon found out," continued Mrs. Corny, "what manner of woman he had married. At first he tried to clarify stupidity with common sense. Failing utterly, he sat on her—she was a down cushion, you know. He used to call her Fluff, and she never saw the irony of it. Finally she died—*died*! She, a fine, well-fed, exquisitely groomed Fluff, died because it was too much trouble to live."

"How old were her daughters at the time?"

"A pat question! She ought to have died the day the twins were born. They were ten when Fluff fluttered out, and during those ten years some mischief must have been done."

"And after?"

"The first thing that happened was the growth of Godfrey Romayne's fortune. He made his dollars out of mines, you know; and the discovery of a new process in the reduction of ores doubled his pile in a few weeks. After that he gave his undivided attention to money-making."

"Um!"

In Wyndquest's eye were two motherless children, alone in a gorgeous house, dependent upon the services of nurse and governess. Mrs. Corny had supposed that he was interested in the Romaynes on his cousin's account; now she began to suspect he was interested on his own.

"Godfrey Romayne," she continued, "was the son

of a New Yorker, but his mother was a New England woman. The New England character makes for righteousness; it has a fervent sense of duty, a tender conscience, a passion for truth, a very honest contempt for show, and with these good qualities obstinacy, intolerance, prejudice, and an unamiable concern in the temporal and spiritual affairs of its neighbours, the sort of concern which defeats its own ends. Well, Godfrey Romayne sent to New England for a governess —a grim spinster in spectacles, a connection of his own. Yes; something drastic was needed."

"That is the end of the story."

"Or the prologue. I have told all I know. After the death of Mrs. Romayne, I made one visit to the Pacific Slope. The gorgon did her duty by the twins; they did not have what is known in Tennessee as a 'hog-killing' time" (Mrs. Corny was famous for her yellow wig, which was invariably slightly askew, and her command of slang), "and when their father died, eighteen months ago, I dare say they determined to enjoy themselves. I wonder how prosperity will affect them? Do you think you can find my victoria for me?"

She smiled at him as her horses plunged into their collars; but the queer expression upon her plain, pleasant face was hard to interpret.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

PRETTY PARSLOW told Cheape Street that her lodger and patient was going to live. Cheape Street accepted this fact with indifference. Cheape Street took a morbid interest in death, but life was too uninteresting to be discussed. Beneath the indifference a keen observer might have detected disappointment. Cheape Street had been defrauded of a funeral, and a funeral to the very poor is a function which provokes more gossip and provides far more excitement than a wedding. Mrs. Parslow had saved some money (which otherwise would have been spent on gin) for the purpose of taking out of pawn a black dress; so her grievance was genuine. "I ain't one to complain," she said to a sympathising friend; "but I did think 'e was as good as dead. 'E says to me, only last Sunday, 'Mrs. Parslow,' 'e sez, 'I ain't goin' ter live to pay yer back for all yer love and kindness. In three days,' sez he, 'I'll be cold and stiff.' And that was Sunday, as I sez, and to-day is Thursday. And 'e was partic'lar about the funeral. 'I don't want to put yer to any trouble,' he sez, 'the sooner I'm under the sod the better.' And I sez: 'Max, the Parslows are always kep' a week, and I'm goin' ter do my dooty by yer,' which I 'ad saved three and fourpence. But Ellun—she ain't got no feelin', that gal—Ellun is glad, *glad*!"

This portion of Mrs. Parslow's narrative was true. Pretty danced and sang because Mr. Wyndquest was happy. Mr. Wyndquest was happy because Max had renounced the opium habit. The reader may assign

another cause for Arthur's smiles, but Pretty, like all of her class, believed in what she saw, and in little else.

It must be explained how Wyndquest came to meet the Parslows, and why Max was placed in their care. The work of the organisation of which Wyndquest was honorary secretary was general and particular. The general work included the investment of large funds in enterprises such as the better housing of the poor, the inception of new, and the improvement of old industries, and the providing of decent places of entertainment. The particular work was individual. Wyndquest and his friends took each case and treated it on its merits. Often one man succeeded where another failed. "Puggy" Slaney, for instance, exercised influence over thieves. He knew their patter, he could outtalk the glibbest of them, and he had Pauline powers in persuading the artful to turn their art to other and better account. Wincanton, on the other hand, a stolid specimen of the British sportsman and country gentleman, gave his time and attention to drunkards. He had, in an eminent degree, that patience, good temper, and obstinacy which qualify a man to succeed in arduous undertakings. Wyndquest worked here, there, everywhere, but he preferred dealing with men; he understood men and they understood him. And yet his success had been principally amongst women. Pretty Parslow once said, "It's easy to put the fear o' Gawd into an empty stomach, but you can't put the love." The girl touched a truth of which her own case furnished an example. One day Arthur was walking down Leather Lane; an unsavoury lane, not far from Hatton Garden, where in ancient days Sir Christopher Hatton had a pleasaunce, a pleasaunce beloved of Walter Raleigh, and where, if history be true, he and his rival, the owner of the garden, contended for the smiles of the Virgin Queen. The pleached alleys and covert walks of Elizabethan days are now stews given over for the most part to the Italian colony. And in Leather Lane, on a Saturday's summer night, you will be sure to find the ice cream

vendors and organ-grinders doing a roaring trade. At such times Cheape Street goes to Leather Lane for exercise and refreshment. And here Wyndquest met Miss Parslow. He had stopped to admire the dancing of two small girls, when he became aware of a hand in his coat pocket. The fact that he was aware of it proved the hand to belong to an amateur. In a second Arthur's hand enclosed some small struggling fingers, and, turning sharply, his eyes encountered the hazel orbs of Pretty. She was about to break out into brazen abuse, but Wyndquest said quietly, "Does this hand belong to you? I found it in my pocket. Will you promise not to run away if I let it go?" Pretty stared less defiantly, and Arthur could feel the muscles of her hand relax. "Don't be afraid," he continued; "I would sooner help you than hurt you. I have been hungry. Let me give you a meal." He led her out of the crowd and down the lane to a cheap eating-house. While she devoured the hot food provided, he smoked a cigarette outside. Presently she joined him, looking bashful, but no longer hungry. In reply to Arthur's question, "Have you had enough?" she nodded, and said abruptly, "Wot was that kid you wos giving me abaht—abaht bein' 'ungry?"

"It was no kid."

"Garn, *you*."

"Yes; I'll tell you about it some day."

Her eyes flamed with curiosity.

"Tell me—now."

"Certainly not—now. Where do you live?"

She answered his questions reluctantly, but he gleaned what he wanted to know. She was seventeen years old: a "cas'lety" girl living from day to day with no provision against the morrow; her mother, a clear starcher, was generally drunk and therefore out of employment; the child was the principal bread-winner.

Looking into her face, with its promise of comeliness, seeing the feverish glow in her eyes, Wyndquest could not doubt what the end of this poor creature would be, if she were left to herself. He promised to find

her employment, holding out his hand. The girl reluctantly extended a small, grimy paw; a serviceable member, none the less, well shaped and firm.

"That ought to be the hand of an honest girl," he said gravely. "Good-night."

Next day he paid a visit to 17, Cheape Street. Mrs. Parslow received him with smiles and servility, scenting, as she thought, a generous giver of alms. Arthur, who scented nothing but gin, received these smiles coldly. An overworked curate confirmed Pretty's story. Cheape Street, according to this gentlemen, was a hotbed of vice. Wyndquest—I quote the curate—was not likely to succeed where the Church had failed. "They respect my cloth," said the young man bitterly, "and nothing else. The Parslow girl is irreclaimable." Arthur, familiar with slums worse than Cheape Street, reserved his opinion. From Mrs. Parslow, whose stories needed salt, and from Pretty, who seemed to have an innate dislike of lies, he learned that the curate was not afraid of telling his black sheep what he thought of them and their ways. "'E knows all abaht us," said Pretty, with a grin, "and 'e sez we're all going to 'ell."

Wyndquest left damnation to those who hold commination services. Dealing with Pretty, he led her to think herself better, not worse, than she was. When dismissed with ignominy, for fighting, from her first place, Arthur said that pugnacity was an encouraging sign. Another place was found to which Miss Parslow went defiant, but ashamed. This billet was taken from her on account of swearing and bad language.

"Yer can't do nothink with me," said Pretty. "I'm bad, I am."

"Bad?" echoed Wyndquest. "Rubbish! Tomorrow you can take this note to my friend Mrs. Maitland, who keeps a baby farm. You will help her to take care of the babies; and if you swear at them, they won't understand what you are saying; and you can't fight with them, can you?"

"Garn!" was Miss Parslow's usual answer to such speeches.

According to the curate, natures like Ellen Parslow's were unimpressionable. He preferred, he said, the hymn-singing mother, plastic as putty, easily moved to tears and repentance, the victim of alcoholism ; yes, but saving that—er—*failing*, a respectable woman. Wyndquest admitted that Pretty was a rough diamond, hard to cut and hard to polish, and, so reflecting, remembered that diamond cuts diamond, and that if he could find another tough and impenetrable gem, the process of attrition might accomplish some results.

About this time—nine months after the first meeting with Pretty—he found Max in Limehouse. The American was working in and about the docks, decorating cabins, painting sign-boards, and occasionally getting a job at one of the theatres. Then he broke down completely. Wyndquest and Slaney agreed that here was a case of more than ordinary interest. Max was taken to 17, Cheape Street, which was not too far from Mecklenburgh Square, and Pretty was given the job of nursing him. Wyndquest told Max that Pretty was making the fight of her life against odds, and he told Pretty the same story about her patient. The experiment at the moment when he supposed it had failed justified expectation.

Upon the evening of the day when he drove down to Hurlingham, he called, according to promise, upon the young man. It was past eight when he left Mecklenburgh Square, and one or two stars were palely twinkling, mere pin-point lights. When he looked up in Cheape Street the heavens were ablaze. The marvel of it smote him. Was it so with him? Had he been living in the twilight? And now was his heaven illumined? He said "Yes" to that question as he climbed the stairs of the lodging-house.

Max received him with a wan smile, for he had had another attack, not so violent as that of the day before, but followed, as always happens, by great prostration and irritability. Pretty made her report, and said that the doctor had called in the morning.

"I'm round the corner," muttered Max. "There's

opium in the medicine I'm taking, but he'll decrease the dose. He was astonished to find me alive."

"Disapp'inted," amended Pretty.

At this moment from the room adjoining came the sound of Mrs. Parslow's quavering voice. The first lines were sung *pianissimo*, the third and fourth in a wailing *crescendo*:—

'Ow the troops of Midian
P-r-rowl and p-r-r-rowl around!

"She sings that when she's low-like," explained Pretty. "She was disapp'inted, too, wasn't she, Max?"

"The troops of Midian nearly got me, and perhaps they will yet. Go and tell your mother to shut up. Well," he continued, as soon as the door closed behind the girl, "do you think it's worth while?"

"That depends on you."

"I want to live and work—here."

Wyndquest glanced at the room. It was bare of even the simplest furnishings; the walls were stained and discoloured, the plaster hung in flakes. Only the floor, the deal table, and the sheets on the bed were clean. Upon the table were some flowers; in the window hung a cage with a bullfinch inside it. From the street below rose the nondescript noises of the hour; a chorus of chatter (Cheape Street was never quiet till midnight) punctuated by curses and the fretful wails of babies.

"Your tact was not at fault when you brought me to Cheape Street," said Max sharply. "Had you taken me to a hospital, or a home, or any place where I should have felt my inferiority grinding into my soul, I should have gone mad. The professional nurse would have killed me. Now don't undo your work. Let me have my own way, let me stop here."

"All right," said Wyndquest.

The man's face brightened.

"I shall be crawling about in a week; and at work in a fortnight."

Soon after Wyndquest took his leave, Pretty accompanying him to the foot of the stairs.

"Yer pleased, ain't yer?" she demanded. "Lor'! I saw that it was a Bank 'Oliday to yer. Max calls 'isself Lazarus. Sometimes I think he's barmy. I sy—he talks o' tykin' me to 'Ampstead before June's out."

"He's very grateful to you, Pretty."

"I ain't done nothink. And I ain't goin' to 'Ampstead with 'im. That fyce of his gives me bad dreams. 'E don't look only as if 'e wos dead, but as if 'e 'd been buried."

"That's the effect of the opium. His skin will become as fair—as yours." He was thinking of Daphne Romayne, and a smile lit up his face. Pretty filled her hungry soul with the sight of it, and grinned sympathetically.

"I sy—you are pleased; it's reel jam to yer."

Then Wyndquest laughed, and looking at her face by the flare of the gas, said that he was pleased with her. Even in Cheape Street girls have their blossoming time, and Pretty of late had begun to consider her personal appearance. As Wyndquest walked away she executed a breakdown much appreciated by loafers in the street. Then she ran upstairs, two steps at a time, singing at the top of her voice that famous song, "The Sunshine of Paradise Alley."

During the weeks that followed Wyndquest went to Grosvenor Square to meet Daphne Romayne, the woman with whom he believed he had talked at Hurlingham. Daphne was exalted as the ideal whom every man worthy of the name creates for himself. Wyndquest claimed her as his own at once, without any of that invertebrate distrust of himself and her which distinguishes—perhaps extinguishes were the better verb—the love of a modern man for a modern maid. To few is given the good gift of knowing what is wanted, and with that knowledge the faculty or *rectifying*—the word is used in its chemical sense of reducing to extreme purity and strength—all powers to the attainment of the desired object.

Having made up his mind that he wished to marry Daphne, Arthur began to court her delicately but per-

sistently. At first the girl was flattered, then frightened, fright melting into excitement. Finally, being a weakling, she became possessed of this spirit of love so much stronger than herself. She repeated to Bridget what Arthur said, and Bridget listened with a smile on her face and an ache at her heart.

"He fell in love with me at first sight. But I did nothing, you know. In fact I—I was thinking of poor Mr. Chips, who—who seems, by the way, to have transferred his allegiance to you, darling."

Bridget shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"You told me once," she said, "that you would like to be a peeress."

Daphne smiled.

"Why shouldn't Arthur become a peer?" she asked sharply. "I have made him understand that I am ambitious on his account. If he marries me, he must go into Parliament. You can trust me to push his fortunes. Why shouldn't I have a salon? He is thinking of giving up his work in Stepney."

"To please *you*?" exclaimed Bridget.

"To please little me," said Daphne triumphantly. "He must get out of that stupid groove. Fancy a man of his ability burying his talents in Whitechapel, when Westminster is clamouring for them. I shall be bitterly disappointed if Arthur does not become a Cabinet Minister."

"You are playing with edged tools," said Bridget.

"I like edged tools. I hate anything dull."

In this game of cross purposes, Anthony soon became entangled. Taking for granted that Daphne would find his clever cousin irresistible, he told his mother, and finally Daphne herself, that he hoped to win Bridget. Daphne anointed him daily with the spikenard of sympathy and encouragement.

"Bless you," she said, "a woman, at any rate an American woman, begins to get scared when she thinks her personality is at stake. Bridget Romayne is somebody, but Bridget Wyndquest will only be Anthony Wyndquest's wife"

"Humbug!" growled Chips. "I'm far more likely to be known as Bridget Wyndquest's husband."

"It is very sweet and modest of you to say so. Certainly falling in love with—with *us* has done you good."

"I'd like to marry both of you and be done with it. I say, Daphne, do you know that I came within an ace of proposing to you? I did indeed."

"I know you did. I wonder what I should have said?" she added.

"You would have said 'no.' I'm not the ass I was, Daphne. Bridget taught me a lesson. Do you remember that afternoon at Hurlingham? By Jove—I caught it hot and strong. My extravagance, my idleness, my breaking of the fifth commandment, phe-e-ew! She scourged me, and I kissed the rod."

"You kissed the rod?"

"Mum's the word, remember! I am not such a worm as to let Bridget know that I like being trampled on. Some day, if things go right, I may tell her, but not now. Yes; I kissed the rod because of the hand that held it. Why, Daphne, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. These London rooms get so hot."

They had met at a ball, and were sitting together in an alcove.

"Hot? You look chilled to the bone. Come and have a cup of bouillon."

"No, no; I have something to tell you."

He had risen; so she put out a detaining hand, which he took and pressed more than was necessary. Her sudden weakness appealed to him.

"Dear Daphne," he murmured; "what is it?"

She withdrew her hand, and he sat down, noting with consternation that her lips were quivering. Chips always acted on impulse. Had you questioned him, he might have been puzzled to determine whether the impulse to kiss Daphne was fraternal or not. For a fortnight at least, he had regarded her as a sister; and yet the salute which he pressed upon her cheek was not the kiss of a brother.

"Oh!" gasped Daphne. "What have you done?"

"I believe I kissed you," stammered the scarlet Chips. "I—er—I beg your pardon. It was—involuntary."

"Never mind," she said hurriedly. "There, I forgive you. Now will you listen to what I'm going to say? Your cousin Arthur has asked me to marry him."

Her voice faltered at first, but the important phrase was delivered firmly, not lacking an inflection of triumph. Old Arthur—Anthony reflected—had been brought to book. He was not surprised; he had been expecting, in fine, what he had come to regard as inevitable. Still he was sensible of a feeling of envy and regret.

"I congratulate you with all my heart," he said gravely. "We are proud of Arthur, he is one of the best. One doesn't like to crack up one's own people, but I've always thought that Arthur could do anything he liked. With you as his wife, he has a career before him—Parliament and—er—all that. The kiss was not so *mal à propos*, was it? Daphne, I do hope you will be happy."

She listened to him with eyes downcast, a faint colour tinging her cheeks.

"He has asked me to marry him, but——"

"You've not refused him?"

"No, I c—c—couldn't."

"You couldn't! Bless my soul. This is a queer story."

"Let me tell it in my own way," said Daphne sharply. "As if a man could understand. I—I have only known him a fortnight. I admire him immensely. I believe, as you say, in his future. He can have anything he wants—and he wants me. But don't you see, Chips, I couldn't give myself up at once; I couldn't come running to him when he—he," she hesitated—"when he whistled for me."

"Then you don't care for him as he cares for you," replied Anthony moodily. "If you did you would have jumped into his arms—no, no, I won't put the

case so strongly, but you would not have made a very desperate resistance if——All right, I'll say no more on that point. Now it's quite plain you've asked for time And it's deuced hard luck on old Arthur. I should be. furious if I were he. I——"

"Keep cool. Arthur is not furious. He is much nicer than you are. He is an understanding person. He admitted frankly that a husband is not chosen as lightly as one chooses a partner for a dance. Now, if you will take me back to your mother, I shall be very much obliged."

The blue eyes flashed disdainfully into his. She was certainly angry; but Chips reflected, with that wisdom which is sometimes vouchsafed to babes, that she was really more angry with herself than with him. Chips knew that his mother inflicted upon others, her nearest and dearest, vicarious punishment. If a footman blundered, poor Lord Quest was snubbed; if, in the country, her ladyship happened to be late for Divine service, he, Chips, was made to realise at luncheon that he was a miserable sinner. And so, although not an understanding person, he could make allowances for Daphne.

"My mother will exasperate you in your present feverish condition," he said mildly. "You had better come downstairs with me. I'll try the 'fizz,' and if it's fit to drink you shall have a glass."

Daphne took his arm, smiling. It was impossible to be angry with Chips.

"I forgive you," she whispered, as they pushed their way into the supper-room, "because you are so friendly, Chips."

The champagne being pronounced "not bad," Daphne drank a glass, while Chips drank three. The room was full of little tables, lit by candles in pink petticoats, and Chips was fortunate in finding one table unappropriated. Everybody was talking at the top of his voice, and the dowagers were eating as if they had not tasted food for a week. Daphne played with a morsel of chicken, but Chips went seriously to work, finding the food to his

taste, and the bill of fare a document of engrossing interest.

"You are eating nothing," he remarked, with dismay. "Here, don't waste your time on chicken. Hi, you!" he called lustily to a passing servant. "Bring some of this," he pointed to the *menu*, "and this, and this, and this." The man departed, and Chips turned to Daphne. "Tell me what a man eats, and I'll tell you what he is," he quoted. "When I see a girl picking at a bit of boiled chicken, I draw my own conclusions. As a rule, I take down a dowager, and allow myself an hour; it is wonderful what can be done in an hour."

Chips was shouting as loudly as his neighbours, but Daphne spoke in a whisper. In a London supper-room you must either shout or whisper. Most persons prefer to shout.

"Chips, you were speaking just now of Bridget. I daresay she wouldn't have spoken so harshly had she guessed that you were in the least affected by what she was saying. I wonder what would have happened if I had scolded you instead of Bridget?"

She glanced at him gravely, with a tiny vertical line between her brows.

"You are different to Bridget," said Anthony. "She takes herself and others more seriously than you do. Don't get angry again! It is ruin to the digestion. What was I saying? Yes, I can see now the great difference between you twins. Bridget takes things hard; you take things easy. There you are! You are more like me, if I may say so, and she is more like Arthur."

"Thank you."

"If you choose to misunderstand me, you can. I'm not a nailer at expressing myself, but you know what I mean. And it's all for the best," concluded Chips, emptying his glass. "You'll give old Arthur the fillip he needs, and I shall be steadied by dear Bridget—if she will have me," he added hastily.

CHAPTER V

DAPHNE SHARPENS RESOLUTION

ARTHUR told Bridget that he had proposed marriage to her sister. From his tone and look she inferred that he considered himself an engaged man, although he was careful to mention that Daphne had pleaded for time. Daphne, of course, had given her twin the details, but had not discussed them. For the first time in their lives a shadow lay between the sisters, a barrier of words unsaid—a formidable obstacle. However, in the height of the season, human intercourse even between sisters is hardly possible. Daphne insisted upon going everywhere, and Bridget followed her twin to bazaars, routs, dances, races, and gymkhanas without a protest. Lady Quest beamed on her, taking for granted that Chips was soon to be made happy. She told Lord Quest that Providence had interfered. Daphne—she said—was too frivolous, too worldly; Bridget, on the other hand, had character, stability, respect for ancient institutions (including chaperons), and a tongue that was not always wagging.

Arthur, meantime, was willing that Daphne should taste the wares of Mayfair. From a child she had always desired to please, to be popular and well-beloved. Her adaptability never failed. When her lover spoke of his work in the East End, from which she was trying to wean him, she looked up—with the nicest sympathy. It has been said that Wyndquest could make others feel because he felt strongly himself. Daphne shivered when he spoke of the seamy side of life; her lips quivered, her eyes were wet; not because others had sinned and suffered, not because the cry of the

wretched echoed in her heart, but because she was vaguely sensible that life might hold pain and misery for her. Thorns pierced her flesh; flints wounded her feet—in anticipation. Cowards die a thousand deaths; and Daphne had an inherited dash of the coward.

Before long she extracted a solemn promise from him that he would enter Parliament at the first opportunity. He was no venturist, no citizen of Utopia; his success, so far, had been largely due to the fact that he took the world as it is; but he hoped to marry a woman with a large fortune, and none knew better than he the potentialities of gold. Daphne had the wit to use her gold as a lever to uproot him from Stepney.

During these talks his pride denied love expression. She had asked for time. Let her take it. But to Bridget he spoke tenderly of a man's obligations to the woman he wishes to make his wife, to Bridget he poured out in full measure the passion in his heart. Bridget could not escape from these confidences. Their fascination overpowered her. In a world of illusion love alone seemed real, indestructible, elemental. A less sympathetic medium might have apprehended danger, might have seen the sword above her own head.

Lady Quest had taken a house at Bracknell—The Firs—for the Ascot week. Wyndquest, who cared nothing for racing, was not of the party. Mrs. Cornelius Sparling, "Puggy" Slaney, Chips (who brought his drag), an Indian Prince, always spoken of as "the black man," and the twins (with ten new frocks apiece), composed the company. The black man, really a pretty shade of *café au lait*, was infatuated with the twins, and anxious to lay himself and some wonderful jewels at their feet. A naturalised English subject and an accomplished man of the world, he found no favour in the eyes of the Californians, which was an excellent reason for asking him to join the house party. Lady Quest confessed to her lord that she was a little anxious about Bridget. "The Prince and

Captain Slaney," she said, "will serve as foils to Anthony."

"Ahem!" he replied doubtfully; "you know, my dear, that the black man has a sort of Aaron's breastplate plastered with immense emeralds, and his wife will go in to dinner ahead of all the duchesses. I hope you have not been imprudent." He winked with the eye that was farthest from his wife as he spoke, and chuckled to himself.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Lady Quest, "I had quite forgotten about the breastplate. I do trust, Alfred, that, as you say, I have not been imprudent."

Daphne found Ascot vastly agreeable, and even Bridget (somewhat critical of British functions) admitted that no American could afford to miss so gorgeous and entertaining a spectacle.

"And we have seen it from a front seat," said Daphne, on the evening of the Cup Day.

Bridget glanced at her curiously. She was thinking that Daphne set an extravagant value upon a "front seat." The difficulty about obtaining tickets for the inclosure, the scramble for introductions to personages, the plots and counterplots of those on the fringe of the Royal circle of acquaintance, the still more offensive kow-towing to mere wealth, the rowdiness of the young men—these had wearied her.

"I prefer a back seat," she replied.

"You can go to bed," said Daphne to their maid. Then she turned to her sister. "How white and tired you look!"

"I shall stay at home to-morrow."

They slipped out of their frocks and into some light, fleecy-looking dressing-gowns. Daphne made her twin sit down, and began to brush her hair. Bridget smiled. Whenever Daphne had something of more than ordinary interest to communicate, she would insist upon brushing her (Bridget's) hair. Brushing another's hair, you must stand behind her, which has advantages.

"Well?" said Bridget expectantly.

"Oh, Bridget, I cannot say yes to Arthur, and I

dare not say no. Why did he not fall in love with you, dearest? Do you know that in a sense he did? Yes; he did indeed! He as good as told me so. You said something or other about his book that day at Hurlingham, and about his work. I ought to have told him; I ought to have told you, but I *am* such a coward. And now—you will despise me—but I feel that I—I like Chips best!"

The relaxing of body and spirit, the weakness of her twin, appealed to what was best and most pitiful in Bridget. Yet she remained unresponsive. She knew that Arthur did not love Daphne at all, but herself. Daphne had scorched herself at fires which she (Bridget) had kindled, at fires which she alone could keep burning, which without her fuel must be extinguished.

"Daphne," she whispered, "you cannot marry Arthur."

"Not marry him!" she gasped. "I must."

"No."

"Yes."

"You do not love him."

"He loves me. You have no idea, Bridget, how he loves me and wants me."

The glow faded in Bridget's eyes. The shadows of perplexity darkened them. At first, the problem seemed so simple, so soluble. A bitter cry escaped her.

"What shall we do?"

The "we" betrayed her. Daphne was quick-witted—a faculty often given to shallow persons—swift to draw conclusions which, it is true, were as often wrong as right; now she jumped at and to the truth.

"What! You! O Bridget, I have been blind, blind. That is why you have been cold to poor Chips. O my dear, my dear—I have never dreamed of anything like this. You care, you care," she repeated the words very slowly, as conviction thrilled her marrow, "you care more than I do. Listen—you shall have him! I give him up to you. Leave everything to me. I am responsible. That joke has undone us. Why, why do the little mistakes, the tiny, paltry blunders of life lure

us into such quagmires? But it is not too late. I will tell him."

She was kneeling at her sister's side, holding one of her hands. Bridget's face was buried in the cushions.

"I will tell him," she repeated more firmly. Repetition was one of her tricks, a trick not without significance. How many of us bolster resolution with needless words? And yet the vain repetition of one emphatic phrase weakens it morally as much as physically. Bridget raised her head.

"What will you tell him?"

Daphne sighed. To those who are familiar with Angelica Kauffmann's picture of the Countess Potocka, a description of the Romayne sisters is superfluous. Change the hue of the eyes, the colour of the hair, and either of the twins might have posed for a copy of that famous picture. In the portrait of the Countess you will mark the intellectuality, the fire, the sparkling intelligence, the sensibility, but you will mark also the weakness; a pitiful, feminine fragility, at once invocation and supplication.

"I see the difficulty," she faltered. "If I tell him that I can never become his wife, it will not make him, being the man he is, turn to you. And yet he did fall in love with you first."

Bridget held up her hand.

"Daphne, your duty is plain. You do not love this man, and you must tell him so—at once. You have trifled with him long enough. The comedy is over."

As she spoke, Bridget began to undress. Daphne stood upright, a smile on her lips.

"I believe," she said slowly, "that I see my duty. Don't ask any questions, don't speak! The knot cannot be untied, but it may be cut. Give me a night to—to sharpen my resolution."

Bridget was assured that she meant to break with Wyndquest. God was good, she reflected, and just. Arthur would turn to her for consolation. She did not

know—how could she?—that a man like Wyndquest rarely seeks for comfort at the hands of a fellow-creature. A woman, in the embrace of a sister, can be kissed and consoled; a man turns his face to the wall.

Presently Bridget slept; but Daphne lay awake maturing a plan. In the silence of the summer's night, it seemed easy of achievement, practical, the one thing possible. The virtue of it lay in expediency. To the daughter of the Creole, expediency was a governing principle of life.

Bridget woke early with a pain in her head. Outside the birds were twittering, and through the open window came the glad fresh air of summer, the perfume of the new-mown hay, the fragrance of honeysuckle and jessamine. Hard by a gardener was whetting his scythe, and the screed of stone and steel, rising and falling in melodic cadence, overpowered the chirruping of the birds. Bridget pressed her fingers to her ears, for in her present mood the song of the scythe was too suggestive. When the sound ceased she slipped out of bed and walked to the window. A haze obscured the landscape, the herald of intense heat; and through the milky mist the figure of the gardener, as he bent to his task, loomed gigantic. Bridget shivered and crept back into bed. The swish of the falling grasses was audible; then silence; then again the harsh duet of steel and stone drowning the protests of the finches. Well—that was life. The birds would not stop singing because of the presence of the man with the scythe. The flowers would not withhold their perfume.

Daphne, who was sleeping by her side, had flung a white arm upon the coverlet. It had escaped from the loose sleeve, and the hand lay palm upward upon the pale blue silk, the fingers relaxed, yet curling inward, as if loath to relinquish some desired object. Bridget bent over the face on the pillow.

"I suppose I see myself as others see me," she murmured. "I look like that when I'm asleep."

Suddenly Daphne awoke.

"I had such an enchanting dream," she murmured drowsily. "Where are we? Oh, Ascot!"

As she kissed Bridget, memory brought back the events of the previous night.

"What a heavenly morning!" she exclaimed. "And —yes—I hear a scythe. How delightful! How appropriate in this dear old garden. Why, Bridget, you look a wreck. Did I not tell you that I had a plan? Don't worry! What is the use of worrying?"

Bridget closed her eyes. Daphne looked at her watch. "I shall get up," she said thoughtfully.

Presently Bridget heard her splashing in the bathroom beyond. The sisters, brought up in Spartan simplicity by the New England spinster, were independent of their maid. Daphne twined her shining tresses around her head, thinking the while of her plan and smiling. "It's as easy as falling off a log," she murmured, as she adjusted the folds of a small cravat. "I wonder why it never occurred to me before?" She put on a plain white duck skirt and white shoes. The cravat, too, was white, and Daphne was artist enough to know that a note of colour was lacking. She opened a drawer, glancing furtively at her twin, and selected a scarf-pin of blue enamel, the exact colour of her eyes. The pin was an old-fashioned one, set with tiny pearls, and very noticeable. It belonged to Bridget. Finally, she glanced at the radiant image in the glass and nodded approval.

On her way through the hall, she met one of the servants.

"By the way, Charles," she said, pausing in front of him, "will you tell Elise not to disturb my sister? She will remain in bed."

"Very good, miss," said Charles.

"Who am I, Charles?" demanded the girl, with a smile. "Will you tell Elise that Miss Bridget Romayne is up—or down?"

Charles was considered a wag in the servants' hall.

"I shall tell Elise," he replied stolidly, "that Miss Bridget is up and down."

"You are very clever, Charles," said Daphne. "Is Mr. Wyndquest up and down?"

"He is, miss. He went out not five minutes ago."

Daphne flitted through the open door and on to the lawn. Charles's stolid face broke into a grin. Below stairs bets had been made in regard to the prospective marriage of the heir of Quest. Charles and Seckford, the butler, had a couple of sovereigns about it.

"She means to 'ave 'im," said Charles, who dropped his aitches in private life. "My two quid's safe. Lor'! I knew she wouldn't be such a silly as to refuse the son of a lord, and she only an Hamerican!"

Anthony, meantime, was pacing up and down a small rose garden. Partly because he was a soldier, and partly from choice, he rose early, as Daphne well knew. The clock in the stable yard was striking nine as the girl crossed the lawn, and breakfast never began before ten. Just at that moment Chips was considering the propriety of leaving the Guards, and exchanging into some regiment on the Indian frontier. He was tired of London life, sick and sore with himself, sensible that he had played ducks and drakes with his opportunities, convinced that the woman he loved did not love him.

"D——n everybody!" he exclaimed savagely.

"Oh no!" said Daphne sweetly.

He turned quickly to meet her: a white nymph flitting through a rose garden.

"I beg pardon," he said, raising his hat. "I did not hear your step on the grass, Bridget."

His eye was on the blue pin at her throat.

"Is this Ash Wednesday, Mr. Wyndquest?" she asked, plucking a bud.

He stared at her, slightly perplexed. He was quite sure it was Bridget. Bridget liked to walk in the garden early, whereas Daphne was invariably late for breakfast. Daphne, moreover, never called him Mr. Wyndquest. Daphne always shook hands; Bridget had certain maidenly ways, alluring but formal. This was Bridget; and yet——

"I wish," he said irritably, "you twins were not so confoundedly alike."

"The black man observed yesterday that one couldn't have too much of a good thing."

"Very Oriental," said Chips. "I say—are you game for a spin? This garden, so neatly trimmed and cockered up, rather bothers me this morning. Come on."

Daphne nodded and moved to his side. Some glorious woods were close at hand, and into these they plunged in silence, walking swiftly through the green bracken, yet imperceptibly slackening the pace as they advanced. The man's face brightened, but the nymph's grew pensive, and in her eyes lay a shadow of fear. Presently Anthony halted, and leaned against the trunk of a great beech.

"I am thinking of leaving England," he said abruptly.

"Oh!" The exclamation escaped her involuntarily.

"Yes; it is partly your doing, Bridget. You first opened my eyes—do you remember?"

"I remember."

"You did not spare me."

"I was very impertinent."

"No. But from what you said—and every word of it was true—I inferred that you were interested in me. Yes. I told myself that you must care, that—I only mean as a friend—that you wished me well."

"And now I am to wish you—farewell."

"Unless you bid me stay," he whispered.

"You want *me*?" she said slowly.

"You, Bridget, you; it is not a nice story to tell, dear, but I loathe lies and humbug—so here goes. It was not always you. It was Daphne at first. No; it sounds brutal, but it was the girl with enough money to adjust everything who attracted me first. Now I want you. I want you so badly that as I cannot have you I am going away."

So far Daphne's plan had worked admirably. She had wished Anthony to propose; he had done so. And now, when she had only to lift her eyes to his, she

hesitated, for the knowledge had come to her, as it comes to most of us once at least in our lives, that love and truth are synonymous terms. Once before this man had touched her heart. When he kissed her she vaguely understood that the feeling aroused in her by Arthur was not love at all, only admiration and respect. To-day she realised that she did love Anthony, and because of that love what was best in her protested against the fraud she contemplated.

"It was Daphne first," she faltered.

"It is not Daphne now, Bridget. She will marry Arthur. To be frank, I am disappointed in Daphne. I do not pretend to understand her game. She is playing cat and mouse, if one can conceive old Arthur as mouse. Men don't like being played with."

"It will be settled to-day."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Looking at her troubled face, he made certain that she was sorry for him, grieved to inflict a wound.

"Your mother said that you wanted Daphne," she murmured.

His face brightened. Was it possible that Bridget's coldness was no more than skin deep? Did she think that he had turned to her because Daphne had forsaken him?

"It is true. I mean, it was true."

"And if Daphne herself stood here, and told you that she could never become Arthur's wife, that—that she l-liked you best, would not——"

"No, I wouldn't," he interrupted passionately. "I love the woman who had the pluck to tell me what she thought of me. I love the woman who looked into my eyes and told me that a man who thought only of himself and his sport and his pleasures was not worth the powder to blow him to Jericho."

"I was that woman," said Daphne softly. "And I——"

"Yes, yes——"

"And I and Daphne are——"

He interrupted, almost savagely.

"Don't Daphne me! She is your twin, but, the Lord

be praised! you are alike only in face and figure. *You* would not treat the man you loved as Daphne is treating Arthur?"

"No."

"I should say not. It would be one thing or the other with you. Now—put me out of my pain; will you be my wife?"

"Yes," she replied, "I will."

Passing through the garden-gate, they saw the bent figure of Lord Quest, hobbling to meet them.

"I shall tell him," said the heir. "He will be pleased."

The peer kissed her cheek.

"Anthony has chosen wisely," he said. "And, my dear, I hope that I shall be able to say as much of you—a year hence. You are taking a scapegrace for better or worse."

"She knows what she's doing," said Chips gaily.

Daphne gazed pensively from father to son.

"I have counted the cost," she remarked slowly. "Now I must tell my twin."

She paused on the threshold of her room, feeling invertebrate. Her courage began to ooze from her finger-tips. Bridget, however, was asleep. Nature seemed to have set a barrier between the sisters which must be respected. Daphne walked to the window and opened a letter which she had found in the hall as she passed through. It was from Wyndquest.

"I shall run down to Bracknell to-morrow" (he wrote). "I must see you. You can guess why. Have I not waited long enough? Shall I say more? No. If I wrote what is in my heart, I should be sending you a book, not a letter. My work is at a standstill. Since you left town I have done practically nothing. It would seem that my brain is in your keeping. Dear thief! I shall be waiting for you when you come back from the course!"

Daphne put the letter away, and walked to the glass. The change in her face frightened, yet reassured her. The sparkle and radiance had vanished.

"I am really Bridget," she whispered. "Good-bye, Daphne, good-bye."

Then she went downstairs to receive the congratulations of Lady Quest. This accorded with the successful development of her plan. She reflected that Fate had surely touched Bridget's eyelids. Confession would be easier now that the experiment had passed the critical stage. Even the lynx-eyed Mrs. Corny suspected nothing amiss. And so, fortified by the conviction that Heaven approved her conduct, Daphne made an excellent breakfast, playing her part with such subtlety of adaptation that the Serpent himself might have been fooled. She even remembered that Bridget preferred marmalade to strawberry jam, and governed herself accordingly.

Later, with the assistance of Seckford and Charles, and the devoted Chips, she prepared a tempting breakfast for her twin. This solicitude for the comfort of another at a time when a young girl's thoughts might be reasonably supposed to be focussed on herself made a deep impression upon Lady Quest.

"I have always said," she observed, as Daphne left the dining-room followed by Chips carrying the tray, "that a woman is at her best when ministering unto others. Please don't mumble, Alfred. You contradict me, of course."

"Your position, my dear, is impregnable. A famous baronet, now dead, was of that opinion, and embalmed it in verse."

"I do not borrow my opinions from any baronets—living or dead," said Lady Quest, with dignity. "Nor am I a lover of poetry," she continued, addressing Mrs. Corny; "in my girlhood I read, of course, *selections* from Byron, Shelley, and Keats. I used to admire Keats, but in middle-age I find him too luscious. Bridget Romayne will reap, I trust, a woman's highest reward in her care for and consideration of others."

She rose from the table, majestic as Juno.

"Poor Lord Quest," whispered Mrs. Corny to "Puggy" Slaney; "he has had plenty of care."

"But no consideration—eh? Well, our friend Chips has carried off the Gold Vase."

"Yes. By the way, he didn't look like a winner yesterday—did he?"

"When a man goes marryin' or racin' he never knows what'll happen," Puggy retorted sorrowfully, for, like Dogberry, he had had his losses—on the Turf and elsewhere.

"True, but in marriage, remember, the woman picks the winner; and yesterday I——" Mrs. Corny blinked and winked, "I would have bet my pile that Chips had not a chance."

"Fillies run queer," observed Captain Slaney, closing the discussion.

Daphne, meantime, had taken the tray from Anthony and had dismissed him.

"You can tell your twin," he whispered, "that she owes me a kiss; she will understand. But if you want to pay her debts you——"

"Don't joke," said Daphne uneasily, for her knees were shaking, "and don't wait here."

Bridget was awake, and glad to drink a cup of tea, refusing, however, more solid food.

"Why have you put my pin on?" she asked presently.

Daphne glided to the door and locked it.

"I put it on," she answered slowly, "because it is mine. I am Bridget; you are Daphne."

"Go on."

"I told you that I had a plan. I told you that I could cut the knot which a moment of folly tied. I have cut it this morning."

Bridget saw the tears welling up into her sister's eyes.

"I have promised to marry Chips," she continued.

"What!"

"Everybody in this house—even the servants—knows that Chips is engaged to marry Bridget Romayne. Now, do you understand? There was no other way. Oh, Bridget, darling Bridget, don't look at me like that! I *do* love Chips, really and truly. And you care for Arthur! It is so simple. Nobody is wronged. A

dreadful blunder is adjusted. Why—how often you have said that you envied me my pretty name! Now it is yours. You are Daphne Romayne. We marry the men we love and who love us. The amazing thing is that we never thought of this before."

Bridget could not speak, but the pain in her eyes was more eloquent than words. Daphne knelt down by the bed.

Presently Bridget spoke.

"You have cut more than the knot," she said. "It might have been untied. In my dreams," she murmured drearily, "it was untied. You lacked the grit to tell Arthur the truth; you were afraid of what the world would say; you weighed the sneers and jibes of these smart folk against honour and duty."

"I acted for the best," said Daphne. "In your interest as much as mine."

"Had you consulted me! No, no; you knew that I—how could you do it?"

"It is done—now."

"You take for granted that I shall submit? You think you have forced my hand? How little you know me!"

Daphne's face grew white.

"You have forced my hand," continued Bridget, "and it is now my turn to force yours. I accept what you have done. There is the leaven of the coward in me too. I cannot give this story to the world. But I can, and will, end the deception. I shall write to-day to Arthur, and I shall write in your name, putting an end to his hopes. You will write to-morrow to Anthony cancelling your engagement. Then we will go back to California."

"You needn't write to Arthur; he will be here this afternoon. Bridget, don't be rash! Think, think, dear, of the men, and what this will mean to them. Read Arthur's letter" (she pulled it from her pocket); "there! is such love to be trifled with?"

Bridget read the letter, and her heart softened.

"God help me!" she cried. "I am weak, weak as water."

Daphne saw an advantage, and clutched it.

"Bridget, tell him! He is wise and kind. He has suffered. He can make allowance for us. Tell him all! And I will tell Chips."

She pleaded with caresses also, and tears, which with her, and with women like her, flow easily.

"I intended to tell Chips," she whispered. "It will be so easy—later. A good joke! He will kiss me and say that all is fair in love. Indeed, I would have told him this morning, only—only——"

"You did not dare."

"I promise to tell him to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?"

"Bridget! Give me one day! Only one day!"

"I must think it over," said Bridget. She laid her head back on the pillow feeling worn out. Daphne took off her white duck jacket. The coach would be at the door in less than half an hour.

"I am going to ring for Elise," she said. "I must dress."

"You never forget the important things of life, do you? Yes, ring! You must dress, and I must dress presently; and we both must grin and chatter and pretend."

"It—er—helps us," faltered Daphne, with her finger on the button of the bell.

"You—not me. I see things in truer proportion. You say it will be easy to tell your lover later that you have lied to him. It will be harder every minute that you live. But how can I make you see this with my eyes? Yes; prink, it will help—*you*. And you will bask in the Inclosure to-day, and the Prince will congratulate you, and the Princess will smile sweetly, and the women with plain daughters will grind their teeth, and you will enjoy it all because you are you, and I shall be in misery because I am I."

CHAPTER VI

CHEAPE STREET—AND GREEN FIELDS

UPON Thursday in Ascot week, in the evening, Wyndquest went again to Cheape Street, where Max was still lodging, having found work as a scene painter in a theatre hard by. Max received him with a question: "How do I look?"

"Another man."

"That's right. I've changed so, that even Pretty is beginning to like me. She used to shy at my face, as a filly might shy at a dead dog in the road. Don't blame the girl! Bear no malice. I'm a sort of Ishmael, but I shall not forget Pretty or you. I'm going to give Pretty a good time, anyhow."

"Um!"

"Why not?"

Wyndquest filled his pipe, looking the while at Max, who was beginning to recover his complexion, and had lost the horrible glassy look of the eyes. He was still very thin and haggard, and his clothes were the garments of the artisan; but a woman might now be pardoned for glancing at him not once with repulsion, but twice with interest.

"This is a dangerous game for you and Pretty."

"I shall do the square thing by Ellen Mary Parslow; you can bet your life on that."

He walked jauntily to the door and whistled. Pretty came running, stopping short when she saw Wyndquest.

"Change in her, too," said Max. "You haven't seen us for ten days."

Miss Parslow, indeed, had bloomed. Her feet were

shod in new boots, her figure was embellished by a neat grey dress. The hand, moreover, which she placed in Arthur's was no longer grimy; the face quite clear.

"'E spent 'is first two quid on these togs," remarked Pretty in explanation. "I wanted to wear 'em on Sundays, but 'e sez no. They larfed at me in the street, but I punched some o' their bloomin' 'eads for 'em, and Max talked. 'E can talk, and no mistyke abaht it."

Wyndquest puffed at his pipe.

"And what are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm wirin' into silk petticoats!"

"Sweating system!" growled Max. "She's working fourteen hours a day. Never mind, Pretty. You may wear a silk petticoat some day. And now—dance!"

"I'd myke a fine lidy—I would."

She winked as no ladies wink, and began to dance. Max beat time with his hands, nodding approvingly at some of the steps, but Pretty kept her sparkling eyes on Wyndquest's face. Salome made no greater effort to please Herod Antipas than this daughter of the slums, to whom also both grace and charm had been vouchsafed.

"Bully for you," said Max, when she stopped, panting. "I'm going to get her a billet at my theatre," he aid to Wyndquest. "She'll be a star yet."

"'E ain't pleased," she muttered sullenly, the light fading out of her eyes.

"You dance well," said Wyndquest. "Why didn't you go back to Mrs. Maitland's?"

"I ain't fond o' bibies—too many of 'em in this street." She balanced herself on one leg, and then blurted out, "Yer can't myke me respectable, Mr. Wyndquest. Togs won't do it neither, nor singin' 'ymns, nor washin' yer fyce. I'm a wrong 'un. Yus; I'm going to 'ell."

She nearly kicked Max's nose as she finished speaking, and then ran out of the room.

"You put your knife into her," said Max gloomily.

"I?"

"Yes, you. She danced for you. Did her level best. And you looked at her head instead of her heels."

"I am anxious about her. The theatre is no place for her, and you ought to know it. She's gone back to this slop work, which leads to nothing—except misery. She likes it because she is her own mistress. I want to get her into a groove. I hoped to make a regular nurse of her. You've undone my stitches."

"Pick 'em up again," said Max. "She'll do anything for you. She's your slave. She'd sooner black your boots than wash her own face any day. Now, I'm going to be frank with you, and speak my mind. When I lay here dying, I got my bearings. I've had a tough time of it, as you know, and it has taught me values. Hold on." He walked to the table, and uncovered a drawing block. "Look at this."

"Pretty's portrait," exclaimed Wyndquest, "and a good piece of work."

"It's a mighty bad bit of work," retorted the artist. "The foreshortening of her chin is vile drawing. In short, the values are wrong, but you can't see it, because your eye is not trained. And now you have it. I looked at life as you look at that drawing, not knowing good from bad. If I'd run across Pretty a year ago I'd have sized her up for what she calls herself—a wrong 'un. But I know to-day that she's one in a thousand. Look how she nursed me! Look how faithful she is to that old hypocrite her mother! Think of her good temper and high spirits and keen wits! She's bright as a new dollar, that girl."

"True."

"Now look at me. You hauled me out of the mire, eh? And I've often said that if the spondulicks came to me I might try and be a gentleman again. But I don't think it can be done. I couldn't stand the high-toned ways of gentlefolk, their d——d supercilious faces, their confounded conventionalities. I've run wild too long. I've got the smell o' the mud into my

nostrils. Now, my little plan is this. I propose to save what I can, and I shall make Pretty do the same. Then we'll go to America. Pretty will know all about me, and I shall know all about Pretty. I shall teach her English, and then she'll be as good as any of 'em."

Wyndquest was not altogether unprepared for this statement. Men often fell in love with their nurses—not to mention their cooks—and married them. Pretty Parslow had been nurse and cook to Max.

"What does Pretty say to this plan?"

"I've not spoken to her yet. Your face is black enough. I know all you think—so don't say it. And it's none of your business anyway, if I treat the girl squarely. Some fellows—well, we needn't go into that."

Wyndquest soon after took his leave. As he passed the door of the room occupied by the Parslows he could hear the mother crooning one of her hymns. Wishing to speak to Pretty, he looked in, but the girl was not there. Mrs. Parslow was sitting in a chair by the open window. Upon the table was a pile of rose-coloured silk, and on the bed some exquisitely ironed under-linen. It seemed impossible to believe that the trembling, ill-shapened hands had fashioned these fairy frills and furbelows. The silk, too, gleaming with a soft radiance, illuminated the twilight, and seemed to lend a rosy transparency to the shadows. The beauty of it cast a glamour over the sordid furnishings, even as sunlight glorifies a dustbin. Mrs. Parslow seeing Wyndquest out of the tail of her eye raised her voice—

> Jerusalem, my 'appy 'ome,
> When shall I come to thee?
> When shall my labours 'ave an end?
> Thy joys when shall I see?

"Good-evening," said Wyndquest.

At the sound of his voice Mrs. Parslow gave a dramatic start, and then shambled forward, pausing halfway to curtsey deeply.

"I'm all of a tremble," she said truthfully. "I ain't what I used ter be, Mr. Wyndquest; no, sir, my labours is nearly ended. I was singing the 'ymns I sung when an innercent gurl, Mr. Wyndquest. Oh, the change in me since them 'appy days. You've changed too, sir, 'av'n't yer? Yus; 'change and decay in all around I see,' but our 'appy 'ome is waiting for us, Mr. Wyndquest, for you, sir, the good, kind Christian man, and for me, the miserable sinner."

"I hope so," replied Wyndquest gravely. "I am sorry that Pretty has gone back to slop work. She made less money at Mrs. Maitland's, but she was being trained there."

Mrs. Parslow raised wet eyes to the dingy ceiling.

"Ellun ain't my child," she murmured sorrowfully. "She ain't my ch-i-ild."

"Use your influence, if you have any, to send her to Mrs. Maitland, and I shall not forget—*you*."

"Thank you kindly, sir; but it ain't an earthly reward I wants for doin' my dooty. It's—it's"—she put her soiled apron to her eyes and began to whimper, but finding this had no effect whatever on her visitor, looked up; "it's thinkin' of my 'appy 'ome in 'Ampsheer, which I ain't seen for thirty year, which makes me cry. Oh, Mr. Wyndquest, 'as pants the 'art for cooling streams,' so does my 'eart pant for a sight o' the Itchen."

Wyndquest's face softened.

"The Itchen? What part of Hampshire do you come from?"

"From Winchester."

Quest, the home of the Wyndquest family, is to the south of Winchester; and when Arthur heard the name of the ancient town, he could see the water meadows that lie beyond it, and stealing through them the famous trout stream, where the trout only come to the lure of a master angler, the silvery Itchen, whose lovely reaches he had fished throughout many a June day when the Mayfly was up and the big fish rising. For once Mrs. Parslow, drawing her bow—a long one—at

a venture, had hit the mark. Perhaps, Wyndquest reflected, the sight of the Itchen might slake this poor creature's thirst. And Pretty would be out of Max's way. The experiment was worth trying. He closed the door and begged Mrs. Parslow to be seated.

"Do you mean what you say?" he demanded.

"Yus; I've lived 'ere, as I sez just now, for thirty year. You'd take me for a Londoner, wouldn't yer? I don't talk like an 'Ampsheer woman, no; but 'Ampsheer I am. I was born in the county and I'd like to die in the county."

"It might be arranged."

"But Ellun, sir, Ellun wouldn't come. When I've told 'er about 'Ampshire, she sez, scornful like: ''Ampsheer? Give me 'Ampstead!' I can't do nothink with 'er."

Wyndquest remembered what Max had said.

"Perhaps I can persuade her. It is quite possible that I might find you and Pretty a cottage near the Itchen, and work, but——"

He raised his elbow significantly, and Mrs. Parslow had the grace to blush.

"If I got away from it," she whispered, "away from the smell of it, I might, I might——" and this time she burst into genuine sobs. Wyndquest tapped her shoulder.

"We'll see, we'll see. Good-night."

He guessed that Pretty would be waiting for him downstairs, and there, in the shadows of the passage, he found her, with her back against the wall. As the wall was dirty, and her dress the best she had ever owned, this attitude indicated despair.

"Is that you, Pretty?"

"Yus; it's me."

"Get up. I've something to say to you."

She obeyed, grumbling out: "I ain't worth it." The passage was, as a rule, unlighted, but now the mid-summer moon was streaming in, and by its beams Wyndquest could see that Pretty had been crying. The girl who sews for fourteen hours a day becomes the

victim of her nerves. These were obviously unstrung. The poor laugh more than they did, for amusements are now within their reach—cheap excursions, cheap music-halls, cheap theatres—which were denied to their fathers, but they cry oftener and more easily.

"You are spoiling your new dress."

"I don't care a d——n abaht my dress. I don't care a d——n abaht anythink. I'm going on the booze, I am. Yus; I am. Yer needn't look at me. I say I am."

"All right. If you've set your heart on it—go; and I'll come with you, and pay for the drinks."

"Wot 're yer giving me?"

"According to Max I've offended you. Now I offer you an apology, and as much 'booze' as you want. Can I do more?"

Pretty began to laugh.

"I was shirty," she admitted, "because you wouldn't look at my new steps, and because you acted crosslike. And I give up the bibies, because you never cyme near Cheape Street. I s'posed yer'd forgotten us."

"I have been busy," said Wyndquest. "Now, Pretty, how would you like to go and live in a nice snug little cottage in Hampshire?"

"Lor'! 'Ampshire—that's where mother was born; and she's always a-talkin' of it—that and Jerusalem the golden. She sez there's milk and 'oney in both, an' crowns o' glory, but, blime me! if I know what she'd do with milk and 'oney. Sorsidges and gin, now, 'd be diff'rent, but milk and 'oney! Oh, my! And as for crowns o' glory, why, if she 'ad one, she'd pawn it!" And Miss Parslow began to giggle convulsively.

"You prefer Cheape Street to a cottage in Hampshire?"

"That's right," said the girl, nodding her head, and putting a stop to her giggles when she noted the deeper inflection of Arthur's voice. "Yus; I like ter be in fash'nable sersiety. I'd find it orful dull in the country."

"It might be dull for you at first; but if it made a sober woman of your mother, what then?"

"Mother? Sober? Never?"

"It would be a fight, but then you like to fight, Pretty, don't you?"

"It ain't no use fighting the Devil. He wins always."

"Not always," said Wyndquest. "It would be a fine fight, Pretty."

"Yus; I s'pose so."

"Think it over. Good-night."

"Good-night. I sy—I'll go back to the bibies, soon as the petticoat job is done. I'm sorry I cheeked yer."

CHAPTER VII

SPLENDIDE MENDAX

BRIDGET sat sewing in the garden, her thoughts more busy than her fingers. She had made up her mind to receive Arthur, and to tell him the truth. Daphne had sent a telegram, asking him to come down by an earlier train ; Daphne had suggested the propriety of Bridget's seeing Arthur before she and the others returned from the course ; Daphne had pointed out, with admirable logic, one method by which an angry man may be conciliated : "Let him abuse me," she said, with magnanimity. "I don't care what he thinks of poor little me." Indeed, when she found herself on the top of the coach, with Anthony beside her, she was able to congratulate herself upon what she called a "coup." Bridget, she reflected, had looked at the matter from the bedroom point of view. Bowling along a smooth road, in charming company, beneath azure skies, it was wrong, un-Christian, not to accept with a serene and cheerful spirit the troubles which Providence may send us. Moreover, the marked deference of the servants paid to a future mistress, the reassuring smiles of her friends, the august approval and solicitude of Lady Quest, were *proofs*—if proofs were needed—that Providence had used her as the instrument by which good mgiht be shown to triumph over evil.

Arthur answered Daphne's telegram, saying that he would be at Bracknell at 2.23 ; and Lady Quest gave instructions that a dogcart should be sent to the station to meet him. She was complacently alive to the profit accruing to herself from this double engagement. To her, pounds, shillings, and pence were what faith, hope,

and charity may be to other ladies; she had faith in pence, hope in shillings, and a love, an ever-increasing love of pounds. Thanks to her thrift, the House of Quest had not crumbled to pieces; and now, when it was about to be restored to its pristine splendour, the châtelaine and architect may be pardoned for taking a goodly share of the credit. She promised Lord Quest that her name should be taken from certain advertisements. For some years English-speaking people have been reading with interest that the Viscountess Quest has given Odontine an extended trial, and can speak highly of its superlative merit as a whitener and preserver of teeth. A brand of American baking-powder, a golfing cape, a hair restorer, and a corset adapted to ladies with a tendency toward corpulency (to quote the words of the advertisement), have been also distinguished by the endorsement of this dame of quality. And in other innocent ways she had added to a meagre income, receiving more than one large cheque for services rendered in introducing to the world of Mayfair ladies who, lacking a friend at court, might have languished for ever in the stately seclusion of Kensington Palace Gardens.

Presently Bridget heard the scrunching of gravel, and knew that the dogcart was leaving the stables. Within half an hour Wyndquest would be with her; within an hour he would be in possession of the truth. Her hands began to tremble; her lips grew dry. The suspense was intolerable. She threw down her embroidery, rose up, and walked towards the lodge. Her mind needed the stimulus of action; and she determined to meet fate halfway by walking towards the station. She had composed, as people will, a set speech, which she mumbled to herself, realising the inadequacy of it, miserably conscious that her *rôle* could not possibly be studied, because everything depended upon the man. What would he say? What would he do?

The day had proved extremely hot, but the road which led to the station was bordered by trees: chestnuts spruces, beeches, oaks; and the bracken beneath

these was still green and free from dust. At another time Bridget would have noticed the tranquillity of the scene, the softness of the English skies, the almost artificial atmosphere of peace and prosperity. She had seen in California a country untouched by the hand of man: great pastures sloping to a smiling ocean, virgin forests, vast mountains; and she had seen portions of this same country violated, so to speak, by the pioneer—the beauty blotted out, so that the face of the landscape was as the face of a Hebe pitted with small-pox. But in California she had not seen—what, indeed, may never be seen in a new country—Paradise regained after generations of care and culture. In these Berkshire woods, art had learned to conceal art. The beauty of the primæval forest was here without the bane of noxious weeds and dead and dying trees. The man with the axe—the executioner—had come and gone, leaving no trace.

Bridget, concerned with fact, not fancy, looked down the leafy perspective of this road to the vanishing point where soon a tiny speck must appear. It did appear, taking the form of a runaway horse, foam-flecked, wild with terror, broken harness lashing its sides! A moment later, she met the groom running to meet her with a face as white as her own.

"Mr. Wyndquest?"

"'As been pitched out of the cart and is lying by the road, miss," gasped the man. "I'm going for the doctor."

She ran on till she came to the wreck of the cart. Beside it, stretched senseless on the grass, lay Arthur. A boy, frightened out of his wits, was watching beside the body; him Bridget despatched to the nearest house for brandy. Then she knelt down and prayed that God would give her this man's life. While she prayed Arthur's eyes opened and rested upon her.

"You," he murmured, "you—here!"

She answered passionately, "Yes, yes."

He smiled; then he murmured to himself, "Seh loves me."

"Are you in pain?" she whispered, seeing his brows contract.

"My head feels queer."

"Lie still; the doctor will be here in a few minutes."

She bent down, seeing that he wished to speak.

"Don't leave me," he said with difficulty.

"No, no," she replied.

When the doctor came, he found her with Arthur's head in her lap, and, from what he had gleaned from the groom, drew his own conclusions. Then he made an examination of the injuries.

"Absolute quiet and good nursing will, I trust, put our patient on his legs in a few days," he said at last. "This is *the* Mr. Wyndquest—is it not?"

"Yes."

"My house," said the doctor kindly, "is at Mr. Wyndquest's service. My wife and I will do what we can for him. He cannot decide for himself. Will you decide for him?"

"You are very kind," said Bridget, "but——"

"I will consult, of course, with any London man. And a spare room is at your disposal—if you wish to help with the nursing."

Again Bridget felt the blood surging into her cheeks. "There is room at The Firs," she answered quietly. "If a consultation is necessary, please wire for Sir George Lyon."

Accordingly, Arthur was taken to The Firs; but when the party returned from the course, Lady Quest, after showing the greatest feeling, declared that she could not *quite* commend the arrangements.

"I look upon Arthur as a son," she told Bridget; "and you, my dear, as a daughter. But this doctor, from all I can learn, seems to be a competent and kind man—and surprisingly thoughtful. And—er—we leave here on Monday."

"We—you, I mean, can take the house on."

"My dear, the rent!"

"The rent!" said Bridget impatiently. "I never thought of that!"

"Perhaps not," said Lady Quest rather stiffly. "I—er—have."

Mrs. Corny and the others were very sympathetic, but it was plain that Bridget's resolution to nurse the injured man was taken as formal ratification of an engagement. Condolence, in more senses than one, is sometimes a synonym of congratulation.

Daphne shed tears. She had basked in the smiles of Royalty; she had received the homage of many very smart Jews and Gentiles; she had been told that her frock was the prettiest in the Inclosure. After these delights, the news of Arthur's accident was as that violent pain which afflicts some young persons who have eaten too much iced pudding. The spasm, however, soon passed. Daphne managed to make an excellent tea. Anthony waited on her hand and foot; and the Indian Prince gazed at her with the sorrows of Satan in his Oriental eyes.

"I am going upstairs," said Bridget presently. "Will you come with me?"

She looked at Daphne, who rose at once, no longer hungry, but curious. As the twins moved slowly across the lawn, the Prince turned to Anthony.

"Can you tell them apart?" he said.

"I? Well, *rather*! There is really an enormous difference. Bridget, of course, is a little bit excited; natural enough—eh? And the other is, as naturally, off colour, on account of poor Arthur's smash, although it does not seem to be serious. Tell 'em apart, I should think I could!"

"I can't," said the Prince.

"Nor can I," said Mrs. Corny thoughtfully.

Alone with her twin, Daphne asked half a dozen questions, one after the other.

"Then he is firmly convinced that you are I?" she said in conclusion. "Oh, Bridget, how simple that makes it!"

"Simple?"

"Don't you see? After you have faithfully nursed him, after the—er—intimacy, and—er—all that, it will be so easy to tell him."

"Will it be easy to tell Anthony?"

"How formal you are! It will not be quite so easy as I thought, because, dear, he is so certain that he knows us apart. He has mentioned it half a dozen times. You know he is a one-string man. And he has played this particular tune with all the variations. Of course I must tell him. I promised you. But it will not be easy."

"To-morrow," said Bridget.

"Oh, dearest, not to-morrow. After all this excitement I shall be a wreck to-morrow. Let me make a bargain with you. I do, solemnly and sincerely, promise and swear that I'll tell Chips when you tell Arthur. That's fair—isn't it?"

Bridget sat down wearily.

"I don't think I shall nurse him," she said slowly. "I ought not to do it. And yet," her eyes glowed, "he asked me not to leave him."

"It would be heartless to leave him. Sometimes—darling, don't be angry—but sometimes I feel that you have not quite so much—feeling, as I have. Now do you think I could leave Chips if he were ill and wanted me?"

"Well or ill I think you will try to stick to Chips," said Bridget.

"Well or ill!" echoed Daphne, with swimming eyes. "In sickness or in health!"

"We have not come to the marriage service yet."

"But you must nurse Arthur."

"I ought to keep away."

"It is too late to think of that," said Daphne.

After dinner, the doctor came to Bridget, and said that he would like to have Sir George Lyon's opinion. So the great surgeon was sent for. But in acknowledgment of his fee he could only assure his dear Lady Quest that her nephew could not possibly be in better hands. Arthur was now delirious; till he recovered his senses no prognosis was worth mentioning. Sir George, however, was strongly of opinion that no great harm had been done. He spoke of the *vis medicatrix*

naturæ, and pocketed his twenty-five guineas, with a reassuring smile.

Bridget sat by the sick man's pillow and heard him calling for Daphne. Scores of times she was constrained to answer: "I am here, Arthur, I am here." Her voice soothed him for a few minutes, and then he would begin again: "Daphne, Daphne, where are you?"

So the night passed.

On the morrow the papers had two paragraphs concerning the house of Quest. One set forth briefly that a marriage had been arranged and would shortly take place between the Hon. Anthony Wyndquest and Bridget, second daughter of the late Godfrey Romayne; the other stated with infinite regret that the author of *The Samaritans* was lying dangerously ill at The Firs, Bracknell.

With the dawn, however, came a decided change for the better, and Wyndquest fell asleep. Bridget was persuaded by Anthony to lie down, and a professional nurse took her place. When Bridget awoke it was nearly ten. She dressed and went downstairs, feeling very hopeful, for Arthur was still asleep. Charles brought coffee and rolls to the lawn, where Daphne and Anthony were awaiting her. Lady Quest sent a note saying she was in bed—prostrated. Bridget smiled when she read it, remembering that in domestic crises, great or small, it was Lady Quest's habit to retire to her boudoir or bedroom, where she would pass several hours in what she called meditation. From these retreats she always emerged refreshed and fortified.

"Well," said Chips gaily, "the doctor says that Master Arthur's pulse is normal. He will wake up not much the worse for his toss. It seems that that confounded mare, whom I have never liked, shied at a motor, and bolted, kicking the trap to blazes as she ran. Old Arthur must have pitched on his head—which was lucky, for that's his strongest part. I was just saying to my little woman that we might as well be married all together after Goodwood. What do you say—eh?"

He looked in the most friendly manner at Bridget, who sipped her coffee in silence. She could see that the joyous Chips was more than satisfied with his bargain. He had assumed that air of protectorship which sits so well upon broad shoulders. Already Daphne was his little woman.

"Don't," said the little woman, rather tartly. "Don't you see that——"

"I see nothing," he replied, in good humour; "the sun is in my eyes."

He stared amorously at Daphne, and laughed.

Just then the attention of the party was distracted from thoughts of orange blossom and myrtle by the appearance on the drive of a travel-stained object. This, indeed, was no other than Ellen Mary Parslow, who, being neither bashful nor timid, now advanced across the lawn, and demanded in good, honest tones if the house facing her was The Firs. The question being answered by Anthony in the affirmative, she asked, with equal directness of speech, how Wyndquest did. But this time her voice faltered, and Bridget's quick ear caught a note of distress.

"I 'eard as 'ow he was chucked out of a dawg cart," she added. "Read it in the pipers."

"Where do you live?" said Anthony.

"In Buckingham Palace," she answered shortly, eyeing this large, smiling young man with disfavour. "Will one of you lidies kindly tell me 'ow Mr. Wyndquest is? 'E's a particler friend of mine."

Bridget assured her that the patient was much better, and sleeping quietly.

"I've come down," said Miss Parslow, rather defiantly, "to nurse 'im. I didn't say nothink to nobody. And 'ere I am."

"Here you are," repeated Anthony. "And now that you are here amongst people who are all particular friends of Mr. Wyndquest, won't you sit down and have a cup of coffee?"

"Garn!" exclaimed Miss Parslow suspiciously.

"He is not joking," said Bridget hurriedly. "You

have come a long way to ask for news of a friend. You came because you thought you could help. Do you think that you are not welcome to more than a cup of coffee?"

Pretty stared at the speaker; then she looked with even keener interest and appreciation at Daphne.

"Lor'!"

"Surprising, isn't it?" said Anthony pleasantly. "Do you think you could tell these ladies, who are twin sisters, the one from the other?"

"Yus," said Pretty firmly.

"Indeed! How, may I ask?"

"Easy."

Anthony became interested.

"But how, how, my girl?"

"I ain't your gal. I sy, can you tell 'em apart?"

"I can."

"Can Mr. Wyndquest? They're friends of his, ain't they? Can 'e tell 'em apart?"

"He can," said Chips doubtfully.

"Then I needn't learn yer," said Miss Parslow, with a broad grin. "I am orful thirsty," she confessed to Bridget, "so I will take a cup o' cawfee."

She was at once provided with a chair and a cup of coffee. Anthony gazed delightedly at her hat, a splendid specimen of the milliner's art, being trimmed profusely with ribands, feathers, and artificial flowers. Pretty wore the grey dress given her by Max (the hat, you may be sure, was none of his choosing); but, being no lover of classic simplicity, she had embellished the plainly cut bodice with a necklace of Roman pearls, borrowed from a friend, and the neat sleeves with a profusion of bangles obtained from the same source. Feeling that Anthony's eyes were critical as well as appreciative, Miss Parslow remarked emphatically: "Because I come to nurse a friend who is ill I see no reason for comin' as a dowd. I 'ope you like my 'at," she added pointedly. "If you can get as tasty a one for a fi' pun' note in the West End I'd like to 'ave the nyme o' the shop."

Then she winked at Chips, who begged to have the honour of a better acquaintance.

"My nyme you want? It's Ellun Mary Parslow, but my intimate friends call me Pretty."

"May I call you Pretty?" said Bridget softly, refilling her cup. "When Mr. Wyndquest wakes he shall be told that you are here."

"Call me anythink yer like, but not 'im," she indicated Chips. "'Ullo! More friends?"

She rose hastily, recognising in Lord Quest what she would have called a real "toff." That nobleman was limping slowly across the lawn accompanied by Mrs. Corny, who, seeing Miss Parslow's hat, raised her lorgnon.

"Ugh!" exclaimed the girl. "When I'm looked at through them things I feel as if I'd no clothes on."

"So do I," said Chips.

Mrs. Corny, who was really shortsighted, quickly put down her glasses when she perceived a poor girl through them. She and Lord Quest joined the group, and were much interested in the visitor from High Holborn. Pretty, fascinated by Mrs. Corny's yellow wig and speechless in the presence of a lord, assumed her stork's attitude. Chips, wishing to put her at her ease, and at the same time to satisfy his curiosity upon a subject next his heart, said to Mrs. Corny, "She can tell the twins apart."

"That is very clever of you," observed Mrs. Corny. "You are sharper than we are. Won't you tell us how to do it?"

Thus entreated, Pretty put down her leg, and recovered immediately her tongue and her self-possession.

"There are marks on the body," she began.

"No," said Daphne. "You are mistaken."

"I don't mean strawberry marks or anything narsty like that. I've just been nursing an Hamerican artist, and I got the straight tip from 'im. 'E sez that no two persons 'as the same lines on the 'and. Look at them hands."

Miss Parslow's instructions were instantly obeyed.

Had the company looked instead at the faces of the twins they might have detected in the eyes of Daphne a shadow of fright, in the eyes of Bridget a gleam of anger.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Anthony. "Now, little woman, turn up your palm. We might have thought of this before." He caught Daphne's hand, and turned it palm upwards. Lord Quest and Mrs. Corny closed in, leaving Bridget and Pretty without the circle.

"Your line of heart is broken," exclaimed Mrs. Corny. "That is rare."

"If you will come with me," said Bridget, "we will ask if Mr. Wyndquest is awake."

A minute later, Chips called loudly for the other twin, wishing to compare Bridget's palm with the one he had just examined; but he called in vain. Bridget and Pretty were entering the house.

"Well," he said, with a sigh of satisfaction, "I don't mind admitting that this confounded likeness has rattled me a bit, but I'd swear to this hand amongst ten thousand."

"It's his own property," said Mrs. Corny, smiling, "but I can identify it, if he ever loses it."

"The boy has never kept anything belonging to him yet," observed Lord Quest. Then he gently tapped Daphne's hand, adding gallantly: "I am sure that no man in his senses would let go of this. It could lead the greatest of sinners out of temptation."

"Or the greatest of saints into it," said the wise Mrs. Corny.

CHAPTER VIII

"VOUS AVEZ SURPRIS LA CLEF DE MA FOLIE"

"YER the lidy Mr. Wyndquest is goin' to marry, I s'pose?" Pretty said knowingly, as they crossed the drive.

"Perhaps," said Bridget softly.

"Then he won't want *me* to nurse 'im. I think I'll 'ook it, 'Ullo, Whiskers, who're *you* staring at?"

Seckford, who so far as appearance was concerned would have been no disgrace to an episcopal establishment, looked down, overcome by horror.

"You mustn't leave yet," said Bridget. "If you will sit down here in the hall, I will go upstairs."

Seckford immediately interfered. The young woman, he said, could be accommodated with a chair in the housekeeper's room. To this apartment, accordingly, he led the way, followed by Pretty mimicking his walk and deportment. Miss Parslow being shown a chair, and the butler having satisfied himself by a hasty glance that with the exception of some pots of jam and a large Family Bible no unconsidered trifles were lying about, the following duologue took place:—

"Did you haddress me just now as Whiskers?"

"Yus; I did"

"What do you want?"

"I want yer room, not yer comp'ny—Whiskers."

"Hindeed!"

"Yus. Yer a servant—ain't yer? And yer look as if yer'd been be'ind the door when brains was bein' served out. Now, I'm a visitor. When I need anythink like a chop or a pint o' beer, I'll ring the bell and arsk for it. Now yer can *go*!"

Miss Parslow spoke with such fire in her hazel orbs, with such a display of dazzling teeth, that Seckford fled. When he had gone, slamming the door behind him, Pretty sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

"'E don't want me," she sobbed; "'e don't want me. Why should 'e? Why in 'ell should 'e?" She sprang to her feet and walked to a small mirror, into the unflattering depths of which many women far less comely than Miss Parslow had peered disgustedly. "Look at yerself," she jeered. "Ellun Mary Parslow—yer a fool, a blimed fool!" She turned away from the glass and ejaculated, "'Ow I should like to kick old Whiskers!"

Then she went to the window and wished that she was dead.

Meantime, Bridget was alone with Arthur. At the top of the stairs the doctor had met her with a smile. His patient was awake, quite sane, and impatient to see Miss Romayne. Bridget mentioned Pretty; her wish to nurse the man who had befriended her, her journey from Holborn, and so forth. If it were possible, she hoped Dr. Lester would permit Ellen Parslow to see her particular friend for one minute.

"You plead eloquently for others," said the doctor. "This girl must be a good sort, and if Mr. Wyndquest wishes to see her, I shall make no objections. You understand, of course, that the case is proving less serious than I had anticipated. Still, one cannot be too careful. If Mr. Wyndquest were to be excited, the unfavourable symptoms would return, and a relapse would be an ugly affair. I must protect myself as well as my patient," he concluded blandly, "for if anything went amiss not only Bracknell but all England would take me to task."

Having thus delicately conveyed an appreciation of genius and a sense of responsibility, Dr. Lester escorted Bridget to the door of his patient's room and then withdrew.

"Daphne!"

Wyndquest's voice seemed to float to her out of the shadows, for the blinds were pulled down. She could just see his pale face on the pillow.

"I am here."

The nurse came forward, smiling.

"I will return when you ring for me," she said, with a look compounded of envy, sympathy, and amusement.

"Daphne!"

She bent over him, blushing.

"Did I dream last night that you kissed me?" he whispered.

"The doctor said you must not excite yourself."

"Pooh! What an absurd phrase that is. Excite myself! You excite me, Daphne, and you can soothe me as easily."

She bent lower, and touched his forehead with her lips. Then she spoke of Pretty. Might she come up for a minute? Wyndquest's face darkened. It was plain to poor Bridget that he thought her cold and insensible. It was possible, she reflected with dismay, that coldness might indeed excite him. Torn by conflicting emotions, her maidenly scruples and instincts tossed hither and thither by love, pity, and anxiety, she stood, blushing and trembling before those searching eyes.

"Do you really love me or not?" he asked gravely. "I want my answer now."

She knelt down.

"I love you," she said solemnly, "with all my heart and soul. I shall always love you whether you love me or not. Does that satisfy you?"

The passion in her voice was not to be mistaken. In the revulsion of feeling, in the certainty that his love, so strong, so exacting, had inspired another love as strong, and even stronger, perhaps, because purer and more unselfish, in the weakness, moreover, following a night of pain, he could find no words. He saw that her head was bowed upon the coverlet, that her shoulders were trembling. His hands were lying helpless at his side, but with difficulty and pain he placed one upon the coils of hair.

"God forgive me," he whispered, "for doubting you!"

When Bridget went downstairs, Seckford met her with solemn face.

"The young woman, miss, has hescaped."

Pretty, it seemed, had left the house by the window; upon the flower-bed outside were the marks of her boots, and impaled on a long thorn was an artificial daffodil.

"Mr. Wyndquest will be disappointed," Bridget said absently.

Arthur, however, was too occupied with his own pleasures and pains to concern himself about Miss Parslow. "The child is jealous," he said to Bridget. "She wanted to nurse me. Yes; a loyal, affectionate soul, and I should have liked to have thanked her, but she ought not to have come here."

Bridget reflected that a man is singularly shortsighted where *a* woman in apposition with *the* woman is concerned.

Afterwards she knew that this incident had warped her resolution to make confession at the first opportunity. The parallel was affecting. Out of the world of London this street-sparrow had flown into the country, beating its wings to pieces in a vain endeavour to reach sanctuary. The dove within the ark, who herself had flown across the face of the waters, saw the wounded sparrow fluttering away, and sighed.

At luncheon she missed the kindly, quizzical face of "Puggy" Slaney, who, with the Prince, had left by a morning train. His place was taken by Lavinia Bidgood, Anthony's younger sister. Lavinia, who in her way was as impulsive as her big brother, had rushed down—as she put it—to congratulate her darling Chips. Mr. Bidgood, who remained in town, was a philatelist. There are three famous stamp-collections in England outside of the museums; a Royal Duke owns one; Henry Bidgood owns the others. Lavinia had been married to him out of the schoolroom, and would have married Bottom, ass's head and all, if Lady Quest had so instructed her. Since her marriage she had become High Priestess of the New Gnosticism, and a person much

sought after in certain esoteric circles. She had modified the apostolic injunction of trying all things, by holding on with impassioned grasp not to what was best, but to what was newest. Theosophy, Electric Homœopathy, Christian Science, were assailed in turn and, so to speak, looted; for Lavinia liked to get at what she called the heart of things and people, and having plundered the shrines, deserted them in a frenzied quest of others. To most of this lady's friends and disciples Mr. Bidgood was regarded as a sort of Mrs. Harris, for he was seldom seen out of his own house in Portland Place, whereas Lavinia was as seldom seen in it. Mr. Bidgood had inherited from his father a large fortune, derived from an ingenious and indispensable accessory to the toilette. "Everybody who wears one pays us a halfpenny," Lavinia would explain. "And they soon wear out. Our income is twenty-four million halfpennies more or less."

Like all the Wyndquests she was very handsome, with a soft, caressing voice, and appealing eyes. She had the temperament of a poet, and the energy and eloquence of an auctioneer.

"You will become one of *us*," she whispered to both sisters in turn. "I have seen so little of you, because, as you know," she added confidentially, "my work is my religion. As my husband says, 'work, and work alone, dignifies and sustains life.'" As a matter of fact, Mr. Bidgood was far too interested in water-marks, perforations, fraudulent issues, and other matters connected with philately, to waste time on the manufacture of aphorisms, but Lavinia, even in his presence, used him as a dummy upon which she could try on, so to speak, her latest verbal confections. Those who had not the honour of Mr. Bidgood's acquaintance supposed him to be an up-to-date Solomon.

Lord Quest, who was very fond of his daughter, chuckled. Lady Quest viewed the priestess of the New Gnosticism with disapproval tempered by resignation. Conversation being the larger part of Lavinia's work, she continued: "I hope that you will come to

my club upon one of our Friday nights. Next Friday, we are going to have a most delightful treat—an address from possibly the only man living who combines in one personality the sensibility of a Maeterlinck, the spiritual insight of a Swedenborg, and the force and passion of an Ibsen. I speak of—Paul Festus."

The name fell rather flat.

"Don't know the cove," said Chips. "What is his particular lay, Doll?"

Only Anthony presumed to address Mrs. Bidgood by her nursery nickname of Doll; but Bridget reflected that the priestess, as an expounder of metaphysics, was not unlike a doll. She was now wound up.

"He has demonstrated the impossibility of sin," observed Lavinia calmly. "Sin is not."

This piece of news provoked Lady Quest to a slight acerbity of speech.

"My dear Lavinia, I cannot permit so shameless and violent an assumption to pass unrebuked. Who knows better than I"—the asperity melted, and the tones of the speaker's voice seemed to be burdened with the sorrows and sins of the ages—"who knows better than I that sin is; that there is," she looked hard at Lord Quest, "a personal devil for ever in our midst; a devil lying in wait for us—for you, Lavinia, for you, Alfred, ay, and for me?"

"My poor mamma!" exclaimed the priestess. "Your devil is your pet grievance. You would sooner lose a near relation than him. Keep him in your heart of hearts. But I and my friends can be happy without him."

"Ridicule, Lavinia, won't change my point of view."

"You dear thing! To change your point of view I should have to change your character. And do you think I should dare tamper with that?"

This was the real woman speaking, reflected Bridget, not the metaphysical doll. Chips exchanged a smile with his father. Lavinia, alone of living women, dared to chaff her mother.

"I think I have heard of Dr. Festus," observed Mrs. Corny. "Is he an American?"

"He was, although he is now a naturalised Englishman," replied Lavinia; then, resuming her platform manner, she continued: "Paul Festus has turned his back upon America. America has ceased to interest him. It was his aim and earnest hope to revitalise the spiritual life of America, but after ten years' work he was compelled to admit that such a task was beyond even his powers; that it was, in short, impossible. In this country Dr. Festus has found a—a field."

"A field?" repeated Mrs. Corny grimly. "A mine! How much money has he had out of you, Lavinia? A good round sum, I'll be bound."

These words produced little or no effect upon Mrs. Bidgood, who turned to Bridget for sympathy.

"You must meet Festus," she murmured, "and form your own opinion. He is the handsomest man I ever saw. He says that he was cruelly misunderstood in New York. That is one of the reasons why he has come to London. My dear, you are Daphne—are you not? I do wish you could interest Arthur in the New Gnosticism. We need brains sadly. I mean," she added, in some confusion, marking a smile upon Bridget's face, "I mean, you know, that brains with us, apart from rank and money and all that, receive the homage which is begrudged to them elsewhere. I have an intense admiration of Arthur as a man and a writer, although he does take the material view—doesn't he? We labour in the spiritual domain."

"Doll labours in one of the most comfy clubs in London," interrupted Chips,—"a woman's club, of course."

"I have found in women what my husband would call a pivot. I am especially interested in young girls."

"Just like your grandfather," muttered Lord Quest. "He——"

"Alfred!"

"My dear?"

Lady Quest coughed discreetly. The late viscount had indeed played the part of Mæcenas to many deserving young *artistes*, members of the *corps de ballet*, eking out their pitiful salaries with generous gifts

of money and jewellery, not omitting that personal care and kindness lacking which Christian charity degenerates into mere almsgiving.

"Speaking of young women," said Chips, "we saw a corker this morning."

"Very shrewd young person," observed Lord Quest. "What became of her?"

Bridget explained, hoping to divert the talk into other channels. This detestable subject of her likeness to her sister was getting on her nerves. Chips, however, persisted.

"Cut away—did she?" he repeated. "So did you, by Jove! But we're going to examine your hand after lunch. You couldn't take me in blindfold now, Miss Daphne Romayne, but the rest of the family are not quite so wideawake. It's queer we never thought of that little dodge before."

"There is the handwriting, too," said Mrs. Corny.

"We write exactly alike," said Daphne, unwisely fanning the flames.

"To the ordinary eye, perhaps; but an expert would see radical differences. It would be interesting to send specimens to some professional."

The priestess came to the rescue. The conversation, in her opinion, was becoming farcical.

"I have considered the claims of professional palmists, caligraphers, and phrenologists," she said authoritatively, "and sifted down they will be found empiric. The manifestation of the Ego must be looked for elsewhere."

"Shall we look for it in the drawing-room?" interrupted her mother, rising majestically.

"On the lawn," suggested Anthony. "A drawing-room is not large enough to hold Doll's Ego."

Bridget glanced at her twin. Throughout luncheon Daphne had sat demurely complacent, listening with sympathetic interest to Lavinia, but not neglecting the Ego in respect to the nourishing of it with plovers' eggs, trout in aspic, cutlets, gooseberry *phul*, and a *Bavaroise* of parmesan cheese.

"Is she really enjoying herself?" wondered Bridget.

CHAPTER IX

OPPORTUNITY AND IMPORTUNITY

CHEAPE STREET at its best is not a place wherein a person of refinement would choose to walk, but at its worst, in the middle of a sweltering summer's afternoon, it is horrible. When Pretty returned from her wild goose chase to Bracknell, the alley was smoking with heat. At the windows of the houses were white faces of children, their mouths open, gasping for air; in the doorways sat the women, strangely silent, as if the sun had sucked even speech from their listless bodies; beside them, rolling here and there, lay the babies, querulously protesting against the discomforts of existence. Some of these infants had suffered grievous injuries from the carelessness and ignorance of mothers; others bore upon their pinched and discoloured faces the *stigmata* of inherited disease; a few—very few—vindicating Nature's wonderful law of adaptation, were thriving and even blooming in this malignant atmosphere.

Miss Parslow herself looked much the worse for wear. Rushing blindly through the shubbery of The Firs her hat had suffered mutilation, and more than one bramble had torn her dress. But rent garments needle and thread will mend; whereas rent hearts may only be stitched together by that slow and patient workman—Time. A girl went down to Bracknell; a woman came back. Contrast had waved her wand. Pretty, of course, knew well enough that a gulf yawned between her and her kind friend, just as a child knows that a gulf yawns between youth and maturity. But she had never peered into the gulf till to-day. Now she was sick and giddy. When she lay back in the third-class carriage, closing

her eyes, she could see the figure of the lovely lady who was going to marry Wyndquest; she could smell the odour of orris-root, a perfume quite unknown to her; she could hear the kindly voice, feel the velvety touch of the hand. The scene on the lawn stood out against the dark background of her daily life like some exquisite cameo. That was Wyndquest's life; this was hers.

When she reached her room she stood upon the threshold silently appraising the sordid scene. Not a detail escaped her eye. There it was—an epitome of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow. In that bed she had been born, in that bed, or in one like it, perhaps worse, she must die. By the open window, huddled up in her chair, fast asleep and snoring, sat Mrs. Parslow. The sweet sickly odour of gin permeated a rank smell of fried fish. Mrs. Parslow, seemingly, had dined too well upon her favourite food and drink. Pretty had eaten nothing since breakfast, and felt with loathing that she never wished to eat again, but she was thirsty, and some gin was left in her mother's bottle. She looked at it hesitatingly. Should she drink, and find such sleep as that? Often and often had she been tempted, as often she had resisted, partly because the physical effects of alcohol were hateful, partly, perhaps, because she knew instinctively that yielding she would be for ever bond and she still wished to be free.

Standing thus, absorbed in thought, her ear caught a sound. Some one was moving in Max's room. Surely not Max, for he was at work at the theatre, and it was not yet three. A thief? She smiled bitterly. Max and she had nothing worth the passing glance of a thief. She slipped from her room on tiptoe and peered through the opposite door. It was Max.

"Wot cheer?" she said gruffly, using the current salutation of Cheape Street.

Max turned. As soon as he saw the condition of the hat, he said quickly:

"You've been in the wars, too."

The "too" did not fall on dull ears. "Got the chuck—eh?" she asked. "Wot for?"

"Cheek."

"You are a silly!" Then she added reflectively, "So am I."

Max asked her to sit down. Looking at her, he began to forget his own troubles. He had had the pleasure of telling an obese Hebrew what he thought of him, and the ginger of a row in which, verbally speaking, he had had the mastery, still tingled in his veins. In short, he was in that excitable mood which succeeds, and often precedes, disaster.

"I don't care," he growled. "I made him sit up. Say, who's been hitting *you* with a fence-rail?"

Miss Parslow removed her hat. Only three days before she had admired it immensely. Now, comparing it with what she had seen on Daphne's head, she became disgusted. "Arsk no questions, and you'll 'ear no lies," she replied tersely, taking a seat on the bed.

"I needn't ask, I know," he returned quickly, with one of those flashes of insight which would seem to be the peculiar heritage of the children of Bohemia. "You've been to Bracknell to see Wyndquest. And the flunkies slammed the door in your face, I'll be bound. Well, how is he?"

"'E's all right. I was treated like a queen."

"Ah!"

"I——" She blushed, stammered, and blurted out, "I s—s—saw the l—l—lidy 'e's going ter marry."

"Who is she? What's she like?"

Pretty pulled a daffodil from her hat.

"She's like a flower," she replied; "not the d'isy and vi'let kind, but a tall white lily, and she 'as a twin sister 'er livin' breathin' image. 'Er nyme is Romayne—Miss Daphne, pretty nyme, ain't it? Miss Daphne Romayne."

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" exclaimed Max. "One of the Romayne twins. Why, why——"

"Why—wot?"

"I know them, Pretty, as well as I know you."

"S'pose you met 'em in America?" America, according to Pretty's vague conception of the Western

hemisphere, was a place sparsely populated, where people would be bound to meet sooner or later.

"Yes; it's a small world. What else did you see at Bracknell?"

Pretty described everything. Speech was a luxury to her; and Max listened admiringly, for the girl had a tenacious memory and a quaint felicity of expression.

"I wasn't wanted, so I took my 'ook," she concluded defiantly, resenting, no doubt, the pity in Max's eyes.

"Once *I* wasn't wanted, so I took *my* hook," he repeated. "Many have stood in your shoes, my dear."

He crossed the room and sat down beside her. Pretty glanced at him with a peculiar expression in her eyes, but did not move. He took her hand and looked at the marks of labour on it, the innumerable cuts and abrasions.

"Lovely paw—ain't it?" said Miss Parslow.

"It worked for me," said Max, in a low voice.

She withdrew her hand and laughed scornfully.

"Did it? Don't be too cocksure o' that!"

He rose up angrily, and paced the room.

"You hit a man when he's down," he said.

"You're a bit 'up' to-day, Max. No; yer needn't shut the door. All Cheape Street can hear what we've got ter say to each other."

None the less Max closed the door, and the expression on the girl's face changed subtly from interest into annoyance. The young men of Cheape Street knew well that expression and respected it. Max was not of Cheape Street, and respected nothing under the sun except, perhaps, the Venus of Milo and a few pictures.

"Pretty," he began softly, "when a man and woman cannot get what they want in this world, what does he or she do?"

"Do without," replied Miss Parslow sharply.

"Pooh! If I want wedding-cake, and can't get it, am I going to starve? Not much! I'll eat bread. Do you know what I wanted more than anything else? I wanted to paint a great picture. You can't understand

that—eh? No; but when I began to feel in my bones that I never should paint it, that I should have to stick to pot-boilers, that it wasn't in me to do anything gilt-edged, what did I do?"

"Opium," said Pretty.

Max flushed.

"Why, I painted pot-boilers," he continued irritably. "The opium was a side issue—at first. I painted the pot-boilers for bread. Now, Pretty, you can't get your cake, you know you can't, so you'd better make up your mind to take bread."

Miss Parslow rose and looked Max unflinchingly in the face.

"I'm not a-goin' to take bread," she replied. "I'm a-goin' to earn it."

Then she marched from the room, with something of dignity and much of rebuke in the poise of her head. Max stared and whistled softly. "Great Scott!" he ejaculated, "there are three occasions when a fellow can't make head or tail of a woman; that's first, last, and all the time!"

He sat down, frowning. Max had his good points—who has not?—but appreciation of virtue was not one of them. Like many men (who have not a tithe of his excuse) he laughed at convention and tradition. Moreover, the use of opium blunts, where it does not entirely destroy, the moral sense, and, as has been said, the drug was still in Max's heart, if not in his blood. Presently he lit a cheap cigarette, inhaling the pungent smoke with satisfaction, because the doctor had said that the practice was injurious to him.

While he was smoking he heard a sob. Sobs were no infrequent sounds in Cheape Street, but this sob had a despairing quality about it, which brought Max to his feet. He crossed the passage, opened the door, saw the mother asleep in her chair, smelt the odour of gin and fried fish, and wondered what new grief had overtaken his nurse. Pretty was crouched on the floor, a heap of misery. She bade Max begone fiercely, and he could see that her eyes were dry, although the sobs seemed to

be tearing her in two. Then he bent down, and lifting her, not without difficulty, for full strength had not yet returned to him, carried her to his room. He had the wit to ask no questions, laying her in silence upon his bed, and very soon the grinding sobs ceased. Max sat beside the bed, smoking and thinking. Before he lit his second cigarette he put his hand into his pocket and pulled out a handful of silver, which he counted. It was Saturday, and this represented a week's work and his available capital. In all there were thirty-five shillings.

Presently Pretty sat up. Max noted that her expression had changed—the face was hard as flint, a sombre glow illumined her eyes, her lower jaw slightly protruded.

"Talk when you get ready," said Max calmly.

Pretty spoke at once. Mrs. Parslow had pledged her sewing-machine. Without this Pretty, of course, could not earn her bread. In such homes as the Parslows' everything can be, and is, pawned—except the sewing-machine, the source of life. To the very poor this marvel of steel is flesh and blood, a part of themselves, the confidant of their joys and sorrows, the patient, enduring partner and helpmeet. Engineers are known to have this feeling for their locomotives. Pretty had yearned for a sewing-machine, as the modern maid-servant yearns for a bicycle. She tended it as a mother tends her baby, crooned over it, laughed with the whirling wheels, wept sometimes when a vital organ became congested; made it, in fine, her pride, her joy, her slave, and—her master.

When she had finished, Max rattled the silver in his pocket.

"Put on your hat," he commanded, "kick your mother till she wakes, get the ticket, and come with me."

She softened, murmuring, "Oh, Max!"

"Then we'll have something to eat, and go to a music-hall together."

She hesitated, looking down at her dress.

"You gave me this. I—I can't pay yer back and——"

"Rats! I gave the dress in payment of a just debt. I sha'n't ask for anything, Pretty. I've never asked for a kiss—yet, have I?"

"A kiss? Lor'! Yer welcome to that."

Kisses and kicks being more current than ha'pennies in Cheape Street, Miss Parslow was rather amused at Max's formality. She had never met a man who asked for kisses. They were always taken.

"Am I?" said Max.

"Why, yus; 'elp yerself."

So saying, she turned her cheek towards the young man, who did help himself very gratefully and freely. Pretty submitted with indifference, thinking of the machine, and also of the something to eat. Emotion is like a cocktail; cunningly compounded of bitter and sweet, of strength and weakness, and like a cocktail it stimulates the appetite. When Mrs. Parslow, with many groans, was prevailed upon to give up the ticket, Max and Pretty hurried to a corner of Cheape Street and Leather Lane, and soon after returned to Max's room, where the precious bread-winner was locked up. Then they sought an eating-house bearing the same relation to the fried fish and sausage emporiums of Leather Lane, which Prince's Restaurant, let us say, bears to the buffets at railway stations. Max had not *dined* for many a long day; and Pretty's surprise and pleasure in a cheap *table d'hôte* dinner were delightful to see. After this banquet they mounted a 'bus and drove eastward to a certain music-hall, where you can get more entertainment for sixpence than anywhere else on earth—a five-hour variety show.

It was nearly midnight when they entered a flaring, blaring gin palace and called for beer. Both were thirsty, excited, and reckless, thinking that the fun was over and the dreary round of life about to begin again. They sat down side by side, and let their thoughts find words.

"We've had a good time," said Max the philosopher;

"so we're just so much ahead. "You enjoyed yourself, Pretty?"

"Yus; I did, I did."

"Dinner and all?"

"The dinner was prime."

The girl's eyes were sparkling, and many persons at the bar turned to look at her flushed cheeks and dazzling teeth. Pretty smiled impartially upon all, professing herself ready and willing to dance for the benefit of the company. Max, however, prevailed upon her to sit still, encircling her waist with his arm, so as to enforce his demands.

"You can dance for me when we get home," he suggested.

At the word "home" her brows met.

"'Ome," she echoed bitterly; "'ome, sweet 'ome! Wot a good, grateful gal I'd ought ter be fer my 'appy 'appy 'ome! And my dear mother who tucks me up in my innercent cot, and 'ears me sy my prayers. 'Ullo! old feller, don't you wink at me," she addressed an aged inebriate, whom one of the crowd was vainly persuading to leave the bar; "don't yer wink at me! 'Ave you got a kind mother, old feller? I 'ope so, I do indeed. And when yer go 'ome, give 'er my regards and arsk her to give yer a bath, for yer need one."

This sally provoking laughter and thirst, more beer was drunk, while the aged inebriate assured his friends that he was perfectly aware of his condition, and—as he said—"proud of it!"

It being nearly closing-time, Max persuaded his companion to take the road again. As they left the palace arm-in-arm, one of the revellers said in a loud voice: "That's wot I calls a good-lookin', free-steppin', nicely matched pair." These words fell with startling distinctness upon Miss Parslow's ears. She immediately stopped in the middle of the street and stared at Max. "Lor'!" she observed; "that feller ain't a liar." Till now she had supposed Max to be ill to look at, a scarecrow of a man. To-night she changed her opinion. Max's eyes sparkled; his complexion was pink, his haggard

cheeks seemed to have rounded out since dinner. Pretty would have been either more or less than a woman if she had failed to appreciate the difference between Max in health and Max in sickness.

The streets were now full—it being Saturday night—of persons like themselves, who, after a week of unremitting labour and privation, had delivered themselves up, a willing sacrifice, to the Moloch of London. Max, whose sensibilities had been whetted by pleasure to a keener edge than usual, saw that many of the foot passengers were young girls—factory girls for the most part—and their attendant swains. Some were joyous, others maudlin, many were sullen, but on all these young faces was the brand that lay also upon the face of Max, the devil-may-care expression of him who says:

> I am one, my liege,
> Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
> Have so incensed that I am reckless what
> I do to spite the world.

Pretty, too, glanced at these innumerable pairs with a queer feeling in her heart. Dimly, she also was able to apprehend, although she could not interpret, the writing on the faces. She clung more closely to Max, and hurried on out of the flare and turmoil into the quiet shadows of a by-street. Here the air was cooler, and, looking up, the stars seemed to shine with purer, brighter beams.

"It must be nice up there," said Pretty, with her eyes on the Milky Way.

"It can be nice down here," said Max.

"No, no; not fer us, Max; not fer us."

"You're thinking of the wedding-cake, Pretty," said the philosopher, sorry for himself, sorry for her, and sorry after his fashion for all who strive and suffer.

"If there were more like Mr. Wyndquest," she whispered, "this world would be easier."

The philosopher made no reply. He was not concerned with what might be, but with what was; being

engrossed with the fact that a pretty, young, passionate girl was clinging to his arm. At such a time even a philosopher may be pardoned if he confines his thoughts to that fact alone.

"Look here," he said roughly, "Wyndquest is as far from us as those stars. He has shined on us—as they do. He has played the god with you. Well, I could tell you a pretty tale about a god and a girl, only you wouldn't understand it. Now, Wyndquest, you say, is going to marry a lovely lady with pots of money; he is famous, isn't he? He has the ball at his feet. And I don't grudge it to him. If any man deserves it, he does. But we, you and I, cannot go star-gazing or star-worshipping, and don't you forget it! Now I'll tell you something else." His voice began to tremble, and for the first time Pretty felt a poignant pang of pity for him. Max she had seen in all his moods: the delirious opium-fiend, the silent sufferer, the cynic, the artist, the artisan; to-night she was to see him in a new *rôle*, a *rôle* in which pathos and bathos are so interwoven that the mortal does not live who can tell when to laugh and when to cry, if the part is properly sustained—the *rôle* of the "has been."

"I am sorry for you," he began, "because you have seen to-day what life may be and is for others. You, cold, hungry, friendless, have strayed from hell into heaven; you have had a glimpse of the crystal sea and the archangels, and the mansions of the blest, and all the rest of it, and then you have come back to—Cheape Street. But I, Pretty, was born in heaven. Those girls you saw to-day were my playfellows in California. I lived in their father's house—a beautiful house, full of beautiful things which I loved, set in the heart of a beautiful valley. But, Pretty, it was not heaven then to me; not heaven till I was driven out of it, for the same old sin of disobedience, and since then I've been getting farther and farther away from it, and now I am here," he laughed, "and you are here, and the pubs are closed, and we must go home."

He laughed because he saw tears of sympathy welling

out of Pretty's eyes and creeping unheeded down her cheeks.

"I'm not worth that," he said, bending to kiss her. "But I saw how sorry you were for yourself, and I thought I'd change your thoughts by making you sorry for me. It's queer, but true," he added reflectively, "that sorrow for others lightens our burdens, but sorrow for oneself makes them harder to bear."

They crossed Leather Lane and entered Cheape Street. At the foot of the stairs, on the very spot where she had so often talked with Wyndquest, they paused. Max took the girl's hand.

"Pretty," he said gravely, "I'm not going to ask you for anything you don't want to give freely, but life is life, and misery, my dear, loves company."

Pretty closed her eyes. The poor creature was, indeed, worn out by pleasure and pain. As in a vision the events of the week flitted before her—the rustling silk of the petticoats, the click click, of the machine, the back-ache and nausea; then, like a gleam of sunlight, the gifts of Max, the dress and boots; then Wyndquest's visit; and lastly the events of the past twenty-four hours. After that the vision faded, and she was only conscious of the warmth of Max's hand clasping her own tighter and tighter.

"Misery loves company!"

Who was speaking? The voice seemed to float from an immeasurable distance, a strange voice, yet familiar. With a start and shiver she realised that she had repeated Max's words.

"Come," he whispered.

CHAPTER X

"SUMMER IS YCOMEN"

QUEST lies to the south-west of Winchester, and in ancient days formed part of the royal demesne of the New Forest. The house was built by a Wyndquest in the reign of Henry VII., shortly after the manor was disafforested. Elizabeth made a progress to Quest; Charles I. lay there for two nights; Cromwell spared it at the intercession of his son, whose manor of Hursley adjoined it; Rochester composed a sonnet in the gardens; in the library visitors are shown a beautiful table by André Boule upon which Congreve is said to have written one of his wittiest comedies.

But the glory of Quest is the double moat. Looking down from the highest knoll in the Chase, you will see the garden-moat, which is now dry, encircling the old-fashioned gardens, a paradise of grass walks and alleys, of yew hedges, arches, and bowling-green, of fountains surrounded by *amorini*, of curious leaden urns and sundials. When Rochester walked down these alleys they were sown thick with sweet-smelling herbs—burnet, wild thyme, and water-mint—herbs which the poet crushed underfoot as he strolled up and down. In the heart of this delightful pleasaunce lies the moat proper, a broad border of clearest water, and rising out of it and reflected in it, cool and grey, are the towers and battlements, the mullioned windows, the quaint buttresses of the finest specimen of Tudor architecture to be found in the south of England.

To Quest came Arthur as soon as the doctor permitted him to be moved, and with him Lady Quest, the

twins, and Anthony, who, in view of his approaching marriage, was about to leave the Guards. Chips wished to be married after Goodwood, and to this Daphne made no objections. In the eyes of her lover and his world she was Bridget, but the difference between the sisters was growing more marked every day. The real Bridget looked thin and pale; Daphne was assuming the colour and proportions of an ethereal milkmaid.

"Love makes chameleons of girls," Chips said to Arthur. "Our young women take their colour from us."

"How very English!" said Daphne. "If I am pink like you, Chips, it is because I am continually blushing at your ignorance. And as for my poor twin, she has certainly not taken her colour from Arthur, for he hasn't got any."

"I feel much better," Wyndquest hastened to say, "much stronger—almost myself again."

Bridget eyed him attentively. Yes; the time limit she had set was about to expire. When Arthur was free from all taint of weakness, physical or mental, she had told herself that the truth must be laid before him. Daphne, living in a fool's paradise, took no thought of the morrow. Her complexion testified to her conviction that the future would be as rosy as her cheeks. And yet, Bridget, studying the characters of the two men, comparing and contrasting them with a curious and not quite natural detachment, was of opinion that Arthur would pardon the fraud, whereas the genial Chips would not. Daphne had stolen her colour, and sported it too wantonly.

For at first Daphne played the demure part of Bridget with effect; but, as the days passed, levity returned to her. "Sometimes you say things to me just as Daphne did," remarked Chips, one morning.

She pouted, and replied hurriedly: "You make too much of the difference between us."

Chips shook his head.

"Daphne and I," he growled, "would have gone to the bow-wows."

Daphne repeated this to Bridget, and shed a few tears: April showers. Chips proposed to settle down at Quest, join the County Council, and take the hounds; Daphne spoke of London, Paris, Rome, and Monte Carlo. They took themselves seriously, for Chips hoped to redeem his mis-spent past, as Lady Quest called it, and Daphne prattled of "work" amongst the rich. She had heard this phrase and adopted it as her own.

"We shall find plenty to do," she said to Chips, "without going into slums."

"Rather," said honest Chips. "There is any amount of work in this village."

"Ye-es"

"You *have* stirred me up."

In her heart Daphne was beginning to think the stirring up had been a mistake. Once when she happened to mention the names of two ladies of fashion, a certain Mrs. Victor Hope and the notorious Lady St. Cross, Chips stigmatised them as "rotten," an adjective offensive to American ears.

"Pray—never use that word to me again. And applied to ladies——"

"Ladies! Oh, Lord!"

"They open bazaars; they are connected with many charities: they do a great deal of good."

"Oh yes; they have a credit as well a debit account with the recording angel."

"They are entertained by——"

"They won't be entertained by us," said Chips angrily. "I know 'em too well. That's one advantage you've got in marryin' me. I know the ropes. And it will pay to be exclusive. People will come to our house, because they won't meet Birdie Hope there."

"I hope you will allow me to choose my own friends," she concluded, with a note of asperity.

The other pair of lovers talked much and often of the future. Arthur had taken steps to redeem his promise (made to Daphne) to enter Parliament at the first opportunity. Lady Quest was delighted.

"You know, my dear," she observed to Bridget, "St. Paul himself tells us: 'Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.' I take that to mean that dear Arthur is justified in competing with others for earthly honours and emoluments."

Bridget, however, had intuitions that in leaving Stepney and Poplar Arthur was removing a personal influence at a time when it was most needed. The man's modesty was such that he was unable to measure his influence; while his faith in the judgment of the woman he loved swung from the sublime almost to the ridiculous.

"I was in a groove," he told Bridget, "and I liked my groove better than I knew. You have pulled me out of it."

Bridget consoled herself with reflecting that when the truth was told, she would say frankly: "Daphne, not I, pulled you out of a groove where you are doing good and enduring work. Forget what she said and remain where you are—at any rate for the present." Or, taking a woman's privilege, she might have whispered quietly: "I have changed my mind. I don't want you to go into Parliament. I am not concerned that you should be famous, but I would cut off my right hand to secure your happiness." This, unhappily, involved more fibbing. She had not changed her mind, and she abhorred the weathercock sort of woman. None the less, she had ventured to suggest the propriety of making haste slowly: "Are you sure," she had asked, "that these changes are necessary?"

He stared at her in amazement.

"I thought you considered them vital," he replied.

"But a girl's opinion is worth so little."

"My dearest," he said gravely, "you forget that you are a very rich woman and that I am a poor man. If any effort on my part can in some degree adjust the difference between us I am bound in honour to make it."

Bridget changed the subject. It was plain to her that Daphne had whipped up his pride. It was not quite so plain whether or not that pride, so long curbed,

could be restrained. The Wyndquests were an obstinate race; the qualities which had kept Arthur in Stepney would keep him out of it, if he were convinced that he owed his wife a debt which his energies could cancel.

That same night Lady Quest said to her: "By the way, I understand from Anthony that you and your sister will be married at the same time, and soon. The actual naming of the day has been left to you as being the eldest. There is so much to be done that I beg you will let me know the date as soon as possible. There is, for instance, the calling of the banns to be considered."

The banns! Bridget had forgotten about the banns. Presents had begun to arrive from all points of the compass; and Daphne was talking of an elaborate *trousseau.*

"I must tell Arthur," reflected Bridget.

Accordingly, after luncheon on the morrow, she proposed a walk in the Chase, an invitation gladly accepted by her lover, who was always complaining that he did not see enough of her. She went to her room to put on a hat, and was followed by Daphne.

The bedrooms at Quest were many and small, and quite unprovided with those luxuries which the modern young woman regards as necessities. To be sure, the oak panels of the rooms assigned to the twins glittered with Nankin porcelain and some wonderful sconces; and from the diamond-paned casements a fine view of the Chase could be obtained; but otherwise the furnishings were no better than may be found in any ancient manor house. There were no electric bells or lights, no provision for heating the rooms other than by the common grate, no bath-rooms, not even hot and cold water laid on. These rooms, in short, were in keeping with a house which contained much that was rare and valuable, and much also that was valueless to any one except a Wyndquest of Quest. Rose du Barry and Chelsea porcelain, Battersea enamels, Satsuma and Palissy ware stood upon the same shelf with humble delf and terra-cotta; in the great gallery a picture by

Gainsborough or Reynolds smiled upon some dead and gone cadet of the house painted by an obscure artist, whose name and colouring Time had blotted out; in the long saloon, the most delightful room in the house, you would find exquisite specimens of Sheraton and Chippendale, hidden by clumsy chairs and sofas which at a sale would have fetched but a few shillings.

"If I am ever *châtelaine* here," said Daphne, "I shall remodel these pokey rooms."

Bridget stared at her.

"Remodel them?" she echoed. "You must be crazy. Have you no better knowledge of Anthony? He is plastic—yes; you can lead him anywhere; he defers to you, as if he were an American; but do you think he would permit you to touch Quest? Not he!"

"We'll see about that," replied Daphne airily.

"Lady Quest has spoken to me about the weddings."

"Yes; we must go back to town to get our things; there is no time to lose."

"I shall tell Arthur this afternoon."

"Oh, Bridget—don't do it, don't do it, darling, for my sake! Chips is quite satisfied with me, and Arthur adores you. And for some ridiculous scruple you are about to risk the happiness of four persons. And if you do speak—what will happen? Arthur will forgive you, but Chips will not forgive me. And it will be a public scandal; I shall never hold up my miserable head again. What is the use?"

She began to cry.

"I *must* tell Arthur to-day. Lady Quest spoke of the banns."

"But I know about that," said Daphne eagerly. "The exchange of Christian names won't make the smallest difference. I asked a barrister, putting an imaginary case. If a clergyman of the Church of England pronounces Chips and me man and wife, man and wife we are and shall be—till death us do part. And then, oh! Bridget, think of the presents to be returned, of our friends, of the Prince, who has been *so* kind. It will kill me!"

"I must tell Arthur," repeated Bridget.

"And he will tell Chips, because I won't. Yes; I promised, but I can't keep all the promises I make. Whoever heard of a woman who never broke a promise? Now, Bridget, this is life and death to me. Tell Arthur, and I'll never speak to you again. Do you hear?"

Like all emotional persons, she had worked herself into a conviction that she was a woman of intense feeling, tenderness, and affection. In comparison, Bridget was cold, callous, cruel.

Bridget winced. The love that exists between twins is tenacious. To lose such affection would be a catastrophe. Daphne, quick to perceive an advantage, continued, "I believe in the love that will make sacrifices. You good people are for ever thinking of your own souls and consciences. I hope you realise what will happen to me if you betray me, and there is Chips to be considered, too. I am reclaiming him, poor dear."

Chips, as a brand to be snatched from the burning by Daphne, provoked a smile. None the less, Daphne's arguments, flimsy as they may appear to the reader, carried weight with Bridget.

"I will promise this much," she said at length. "I must and shall tell Arthur, but on the condition that he does not tell Anthony. I can't reason about it. I daresay I am wrong; my lights glimmer very feebly. *You* deceived Anthony, not I, although I am a party to the fraud. I deceived Arthur, God knows unwillingly; but the deception must end to-day."

From this position she was not to be budged by threats or caresses.

Arthur was waiting for her on the drawbridge, and together they crossed the garden moat and began to ascend the gentle slope which leads to the ruins of Quest Castle. Here were fine beeches, the ancient home of the Quest rooks, and farther on immense yews, from which, possibly, some of the long bows of Crécy and Agincourt were cut.

"Look," said Wyndquest.

Before them lay an English landscape, glowing be-

neath a radiant summer's sun. Far as the eye could see were stretches of woodland and pasture, the greens of the foreground melting into the blues of the mid-distance, and these again dissolving into the amethystine tints of sky and horizon.

"That faint silvery line is the Solent," said Wyndquest; "that blur beyond, the Isle of Wight."

"A sweet country," whispered Bridget.

"Yes," said Wyndquest.

But he was thinking of her country, California, far away, which she must forsake for love of him; he was thinking of the friends she might never see again, of the dear nameless myriad associations which cluster round the word home. The moment had an overpowering sadness. He knew that he should never forget it. He looked down upon her. She met his glance, a delicate glow coming into her cheeks, and then he saw that she was moved as he was—to the core. Her eyes were suffused with tears which seemed to have flowed from his heart. He took her hand, contrasting its size and weakness with his own.

"You are giving up a country as sweet as this for me," he whispered. "I had hardly realised that till now. But the great things of life are of no time or country: truth, fidelity, honour——"

She had waited for such words.

"Arthur," she began nervously; "let us sit down. I—I have something to tell you. I am not what you think me, Arthur; I have gained you under false pretences."

"You false? Never!"

"Yes, I; but not intentionally,"

He could see that she was distressed; that the telling of some simple tale, as he supposed, made her quiver with apprehension.

"I am not the Daphne you fell in love with, as you tell me, at first sight. My confession," she continued, "affects my sister; so you must give me your word that you will regard it as a confidence?"

"One moment," said Wyndquest. "If this wonder-

ful story of yours affects your twin, I would rather not hear it. And," his voice softened, "if you are *not* the Daphne I fell in love with at first sight, you are something far dearer to-day. I do not mean to speak to you of my past life, which is *soiled!* Were you quite other than you are, I should still say in all soberness—be silent! I love you; you love me—that is enough."

"Are you sure, sure?" she cried passionately. "I wish to keep nothing from you."

"I am quite sure."

She was sensible that she ought to speak, but the words would not come. They died in sighs.

> Ah! then it was the witching time,
> When early summer steals on spring's sweet prime.

And Summer, with her languors, enjoined to Bridget, what she had enjoined to the birds—silence.

CHAPTER XI

BROWNIE

EARLY in August the twins were married; and after the ceremony both couples went abroad—Daphne and her husband to Homburg, and the Arthur Wyndquests to Brittany, where they studied the quaint customs and traditions of the most peculiar people in France. In this land of the Ankou and Corrégan, Bridget was haunted by the spectre of remorse. Her secret was as a sword of Sigurd between herself and her husband. She called herself coward, because she feared to cast herself down from the pinnacle upon which Wyndquest had placed her. This sense of unworthiness, on her part, enhanced her charm for a man who, having seen much pretension, set an extravagant value upon humility. Fellowship with a modest woman revealed to him a new world. Sometimes he declared that speech was superfluous, so quickly did she grasp and apprehend his thoughts and desires. Heretofore he had approached subjects with the stride of the man—now, beneath the touch of her restraining hand, he halted to his conclusions, lingering on the way, supping the delights—the feminine delights—of detail and discursiveness. One morning, as they sat in the *bois d'amour*, near the hamlet of Pontaven, he was speaking of life in Stepney.

"Sitting here," he indicated with a sweep of his hand the grass, the glades, the stream, "who can believe that slums are?"

"You once told me," said Bridget, "that the children of the organ-grinders have no wish to leave London for

Italy. And who shall say they are not wise? Would they bear transplanting, these poor weeds of the gutter? Have you tried the experiment? Have you ever taken a girl from the East End and planted her in such a village as Quest?"

"By Jove!" ejaculated Wyndquest. "I was going to try that experiment with Pretty Parslow."

Then, for the first time, he spoke of Max, but without mentioning his name.

"I left them earning honest bread, but I left them together, and——"

"You say the man is a good fellow. And she did not like him. So don't worry! You can't keep an eye on all the people you have befriended."

Wyndquest frowned, sensible that love had led him far from Cheape Street.

"You deserve a holiday," whispered Bridget, taking his hand.

"I have been selfish," he muttered. "I am to blame if mischief has befallen that girl. I had influence over her, and I used it for what it was worth, withdrawing it, perhaps, at a critical time."

"We will go back to London if you like," said Bridget.

"What! Leave this?"

"It has changed, hasn't it? The shadows of Cheape Street obscure the *bois d'amour*."

He was touched.

"You are a good woman."

"No, no," she answered hurriedly; "think me good, but do not say so. 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.' So much has been given to me that I am scared."

Wyndquest kissed her in silence.

September was drawing to a close when they reached London, and after the cool green pastures of Brittany, town seemed intolerably hot and dusty. Wyndquest walked to Cheape Street upon the afternoon of the day he arrived, leaving his bride in a hotel. As he strolled down the familiar Southampton Row his mind began to readjust itself. The long lines of grey houses, the

calls of the street-vendors, the rumble of the traffic, quickened old thoughts. Brittany and the lotus-life receded, fading like a lovely mirage, as he approached Leather Lane. The thin white faces of the foot passengers seemed to welcome him; more than one salesman hailed him cheerfully across counters piled high with coarse wares; an organ-grinder, who had a "pitch" near the lane, greeted him with a gay smile, receiving sixpence in return; the ice-cream vendors grinned pleasantly as he passed by them. These people were the weeds whom Bridget had questioned the policy of transplanting to other fields and lanes. At the corner of Cheape Street he happened to meet the curate, the Rev. Andrew Toop, the man who had despaired of Pretty Parslow. Now, the curate, in his way, regarded Wyndquest as an antinomian. The curate and his brother curates and the vicar of the parish of St. Mary the Virgin were all good men and true, but they were sticklers for authority, and ardent ritualists. According to Wyndquest, the methods of these gentlemen in dealing with the poor were open to criticism; soup tickets and the like were given freely to those who were of the household of Faith; and almsgiving was generally regarded as a means of relieving distress. To Wyndquest and his friends almsgiving fostered idleness, vice, and hypocrisy. Mr. Toop, on the other hand, contended that it brought sheep into the fold, and was justified and enjoined by the Old and New Testaments.

The Rev. Andrew greeted Wyndquest somewhat coldly, observing that he had not seen him in Holborn for many moons. The curate was tall, and if devils are to be exorcised by prayer and fasting he assuredly was not possessed of any. Wyndquest shook his lean hand, noting with concern the man's sunken, brilliant eyes, and the parchment-like complexion.

"I have married a wife," he said gaily.

"Ahem!" coughed the curate, himself a celibate.

"How are the Parslows?" said Wyndquest.

The curate shook his head; a chill smile hovered for an instant around his ascetic lips. He was only human;

and he had tried to reclaim Pretty before that young lady met Arthur in Leather Lane.

"Well?"

"It is not well with the Parslows," replied the curate primly. "You had only a personal hold on them," he explained, assuming the priest's manner. "When you went away, your influence went with you. The girl is living in open sin with that atheist you brought here."

Arthur winced. The curate could hit hard.

"You have seen them?"

"And spoken with them. I did not measure my words."

"What happened?"

The curate's pale cheeks flushed, but he was not going to spare himself any more than others.

"The girl kicked my hat off," he answered coldly. "And the man told me——well, what he said is not relevant." Max, indeed, had observed flippantly that Mr. Toop's heaven would be no heaven for him.

Wyndquest nodded and moved away. The curate's eyes sparkled dully. Then his lips moved as if he were praying. He had just commended Wyndquest to the care of God, but he believed in his heart that this lay-philanthropist was hot-foot on the road to the Devil, who, possibly, spends less time in such places as Cheape Street that is popularly supposed. Arthur paused, as usual, at the foot of No. 17, and, as usual, the strains of a hymn floated down the stairs. He did not hear, however, the click, click of Pretty's sewing-machine.

O Paradise! O Paradise!
I want to sin no more,
I want to be as pure on earth,
As on thy spotless shore.

The sight of the long-coated curate had doubtless inspired this burst of melody, but it ended in a lugubrious wail when Arthur entered the room.

"I feel as if I was a-spinning round and round,"

replied Mrs. Parslow, in answer to her visitor's "Good-afternoon." "It must be the 'eat."

Not the 'eat but the drink was obviously the cause of Mrs. Parslow's giddiness. Wyndquest took the chair that was offered him, asking for news of Pretty. Mrs. Parslow put her apron to her eyes.

"I was never one to complain," she whined, "but that gal has treated me shymeful, Mr. Wyndquest. Yes; she's living in this 'ouse, sir. Oh, when I stop and think of what I've done for 'er—— But as the blessed 'ymn says it's only in Paradise that you'll find the loyal 'earts and true. Not in Cheape Street."

"Who pays the rent of this room?" said Wyndquest.

Mrs. Parslow stammered out an inarticulate answer.

"Pretty supported you for three years," continued Wyndquest, "and I make no doubt she supports you now. In or out of Paradise there is no more loyal and true heart than hers. Is she at home?"

"I dun'no'," replied the mother. "I ain't 'ad the use o' my legs for three mortial days, and your words, Mr. Wyndquest, is 'ard on a cripple! When Ellun left me I cried like a child; yus, I did!"

Wyndquest crossed the landing and tapped at the door. It was ajar, and peering in he could see that the room was empty; he could also see that it had improved in its furnishings, and might even be termed without undue exaggeration a home. Arthur looked at his watch. He had no stomach for Mrs. Parslow's society, and within a few minutes at most Pretty would return, otherwise the door would have been locked. So, without ceremony, he entered and seated himself in the chair by the hearth. Sitting there, he reflected upon the events of the past three months; his marriage, the marriage of Anthony, the change in Pretty's life, the issues therein involved.

"Mr. Wyndquest!"

He started up. Pretty was standing on the threshold. She ran forward, holding out her hand. Obviously she was delighted to see him and quite unashamed.

"Max *will* be pleased," she said, laughing. "We was talking of you only last night. 'E'll be in soon."

The change in her struck him at once. Perhaps he stared too hard, for she laughed again and blushed.

"Max told me that misery loves company, so I brought my bits o' things in 'ere, but where there's company there ain't no misery; and Max is first-rate company."

"Well," said Wyndquest, "what are you both doing?"

"Between us," said Pretty proudly, "we're earning about ten bob a day, and we're saving more than 'arf of it."

"You came to Bracknell, Pretty, but you did not wait to see me."

"I c—c—couldn't."

"It was a kind and loyal act," said Wyndquest. "I shall never forget it. My wife would like to see you again."

The pretty face hardened.

"This ain't no place for 'er," she said sullenly.

"Why not, Pretty?"

"You know."

"I know my wife," replied Arthur slowly. "And I know that she will come here and take your hand, and be your friend. And she will ask no questions, and offer no advice."

Pretty smiled again.

"If she wasn't a real good sort you'd never 'ave married 'er. And—and I should like to see 'er lovely fyce. But there's Max. It's queer, ain't it? but he used to know your wife and her sister back in San Francisco."

Wyndquest expressed amazement.

"Yes; lived in the same 'ouse. Max was 'ightoned once. I sy," her voice sank to a pleading whisper, "when 'e comes in don't give 'im any song and dance about me, will yer? Max is good and true, although 'e don't 'old with church-going folks. 'E's done the square thing by me, and by mother too, peevish and contrairy as she is. 'Ullo!' ere 'e is. Max, Max!"

She ran down the stairs, leaving Wyndquest sorely perplexed. It seemed incredible that Max should have known intimately the Romayne twins. He was sorrier than before for the "has been," but his sympathy was tempered by annoyance, and yet he told himself that he was a snob to entertain such feelings. None the less he greeted Max with a smile, and listened attentively to the history of the past three months. Max was employed by a famous firm of ceiling decorators, and doing good work, with promise of increased pay. Presently he sent Pretty from the room.

"I told you," he began abruptly, "that I would do the square thing according to my lights by Pretty; and so I have. You can see she's a different creature. She's just as smart as I sized her up to be, and we get on first rate. Great Scott! I couldn't have believed that our little partnership would have panned out so well."

"You know what I think about it, Max."

"Yes; and I value your good opinion, which, of course, I've not got. You and I look at life from different points of view. You're an idealist. You needn't shake your head. You are. And I'm a working man, with all the nonsense kicked out of me. The husbands of Cheape Street take their wives' earnings, and give them blows in return. I am educating Pretty, and giving her every cent I make, and that Toop person thinks that Tophet would be too good a place for me. Well, he won't come canting here again in a hurry."

"Max," said Wyndquest, "what's this story of Pretty's about your former acquaintance with my wife?"

"She gave that away—did she? I ought to have warned her. Yes," he laughed bitterly, "I once lived with old Godfrey Romayne. I have a vague notion that some of his blood is in my veins. I sha'n't intrude, my dear fellow; rest easy. I am as proud in my way as you are."

"Can I——?"

"No, you can't; not a cent!"

Then Pretty came in, and began to bustle about, making preparations for the evening meal. A well-regulated mind, like Mr. Toop's, for instance, might have found much to criticise in this Bohemian atmosphere; Wyndquest, however, was in the mood to throw stones at himself rather than others. His experience of life had taught him that such relations as existed between Max and Pretty were not only an offence against Christianity and the law of the land, but against common sense. The sin he regarded as general rather than particular. Both he and his wife, exercising the functions of the recording angel, would have held gluttony on the part of a bishop, or backbiting from a countess, a more damnable misdemeanour so far as the individuals were concerned. In fine, he blamed himself for what he stigmatised as a breach of trust, and was wondering how reparation could be made.

When he returned to his hotel, he told Bridget the facts, and received her sympathy, but of Max's identity with the youth who had lived in Godfrey Romayne's house, he said not a word, wishing to give that vexed question more consideration. He determined, none the less, to find out about Max.

"What companions did we have when we were children?" repeated Bridget, as Wyndquest was smoking his after-dinner cigar. They had dined at one of the exhibitions, and were sitting by a fountain in the gardens. "Well, there was Brownie."

"Who was Brownie?"

"He lived with us. We used to call him 'Brownie,' because he had nice brown eyes; his real name was Maximilian Orpin. Then mamma died and our governess came. Poor Brownie couldn't stand the governess. He might have been polished by a silk handkerchief, but Miss Bryant scrubbed him with—Sapolio. Papa was down on him too. So one day he ran away. Papa gave him money afterwards. Then word came that he was dead."

"Did your father mention him in his will?" said Wyndquest.

"No; he believed him to be dead. He went to Paris to study art. Poor Brownie! Once I heard papa speak of his mother, who must have been quite worthless."

A silence ensued. Arthur was thinking of his mother, one of the noblest of women; Bridget of the Creole, with her lazy, languishing beauty, the wife who had been called Fluff. The band was playing Schumann's *Träumerei*, to the tinkling accompaniment of the fountain.

"My mother," whispered Bridget, "was a weak woman, and I—— Oh, Arthur, I am glad you are strong, because I am her child. I have felt my knees, morally speaking, as wax. But with you I shall stand, not fall."

"With me," he repeated softly. "Yes, together, side by side, let us hope that we may stand upright. I was tempted to hide something from you, partly because the telling of it might pain you, and partly because there is a leaven of the snob in me. The boy you knew did not die. He lives not many miles from us. He is the American painter I have been talking about."

"Brownie!" she faltered: "Brownie—here?"

Of what flimsy stuff were made the skirts of chance! In these she had draped herself, waiting for opportunity. Now, if she spoke, Wyndquest would know that it was fear of Max, not love of truth and honour, which had loosened her tongue.

"Life is Protean," said Wyndquest. "There are many Max Orpins, and some learn to like their rags. My news has distressed you. Max refuses money, and is now earning large wages. He does not wish to meet you."

A lump came in Bridget's throat. For the moment she was femininely angry with Max because his resurrection from the dead had frightened her. Already she could see him pointing a finger of identification: she could hear him saying: "This is Bridget, not Daphne." In fancy also she could see the incredulous protest of her husband, his scorn, when the truth was made plain, and then his silence. His silence! Bridget was sure that he would say nothing. And the silence would spread like a pestilence till happiness was blotted out.

"I cannot, I cannot," she murmured, meaning that confession was impossible. Wyndquest misunderstood.

"It is far better that you should not meet—yet."

But as he spoke he was vaguely disappointed. He had felt that Bridget would forget everything, save the one illuminating fact that an old playmate was raised from the dead. It annoyed him that he had misread her character. He could not indict her common sense, her worldly wisdom, but in his heart he did indict her charity. He had expected a cry compounded of joy, sorrow, surprise, and pity: the generous acclamation. Nothing is more hateful than to see reflected on the faces of those we love the failings and weakness which we despise because they are our own.

Bridget knew that she had been weighed by false weights and found wanting.

"It is too cold out here," said Wyndquest. "Autumn is upon us. Come—Daphne."

"You will think it a strange request," she said nervously, as she rose and laid her hand on his arm; "but don't call me Daphne. Find some name of your own for me."

He smiled. Max, the Wyndquest pride, Bridget's reluctance to meet the sinner, melted away beneath the tender pressure of her hand, beneath the warmth of her voice.

"Our honeymoon ends to-night," she continued as they strolled down the broad path. "We have spent six happy weeks together. How many here," she glanced at the throng, "can say as much?"

"Very few," he replied quickly. "Of the love which implies true fellowship, a community of thoughts, principles, desires, and aims, only the very few are capable. So far as we two are concerned, we are in danger of loving each other too absorbingly, to the exclusion of the claims of others. Love must have width as well as depth. Let us hope that the circle of our sympathies will widen, not contract." He looked at Bridget interrogatively, so it seemed to her, but she made no reply.

CHAPTER XII

OBITER DICTA

NEXT day Bridget wrote to Daphne that Max Orpin was working in London and known to Arthur. This letter brought Daphne to town, all the way from Yorkshire, where Chips was shooting. The twins had not met since the day of their marriage. Bridget marked a change at once: an indescribable air of prosperity and fashion tempered for the moment by fear. Daphne wore a wonderful dress of lapis-lazuli blue cloth, trimmed with sable. The cloth was the exact tint of her eyes.

"I'm as blue as my frock," she declared, as soon as she was alone with her twin. "If Brownie sees you and me together we are euchred."

"Would he know us apart now?" said Bridget. "We have changed."

"The lines on our hands have not changed. He knows the difference in our hands. Don't you remember? We are euchred—euchred! I have rushed down to tell you that you mustn't go near him."

"Why did Brownie live with us?" said Bridget.

"I don't know or care."

"He was almost like a brother. Poor Brownie! And he has had a desperate struggle."

Daphne's white forehead was puckered with annoyance.

"We can send him a cheque. Let him go back to America, or Paris. Oh, I felt in my bones that you would be wanting to do something absurd; but you must consider me."

"Why should I consider you any longer?" said

Bridget vehemently. "This lie of ours is poisoning my life. I shall tell Arthur."

"He will tell Chips," said Daphne, with conviction. "He will refuse to compound what he would call a moral felony."

Bridget was silent, surprised that Daphne should have measured Arthur so accurately.

"If you tell Arthur, you will kill me," Daphne burst out excitedly. "You will, you will." She whispered a few words, blushing prettily. Bridget kissed her.

"Wait till *that* is over," pleaded Daphne. "Don't you see, dear, tiny hands may keep us together. You must promise, quick—quick!"

Her agitation so distressed Bridget that she gave the promise, feeling at the same time a shameful relief. Daphne dried her tears, and carried off her twin to Prince's Restaurant to eat luncheon. She was returning to Yorkshire in the afternoon, and began to chatter about the house-party, which included a Serene Highness, who was considered the best amateur cook in Europe.

"He has been so nice to me," said Daphne; "and he's given me the most wonderful recipe: his oney-doney one. I must describe it. You take some nice fat strawberries and remove the core, stuffing them with a very mild paprika; then you drop them into boiling sugar and dry them in an oven; then you freeze them—are you attending?—and then you serve them in *frappé'd* champagne. It's *le dernier cri*, and the dear thing told me he wouldn't have given it to another woman in England."

During the month that followed Arthur Wyndquest took a house in Park Street, Mayfair. The twins had instructed their agent in California to pack and ship *via* Panama the more valuable contents of Godfrey Romayne's house at Menlo. Some furniture Daphne had declared not worth the cost of transportation, but her sister thought otherwise. "I shall keep father's things," she told Arthur. "If I denied his desk houseroom merely because it is out of date and shabby, I should feel as if I were turning a faithful old servant into the street."

Meantime Arthur was busy planning his political campaign. No one was in town, except the Bidgoods, who had begged the Wyndquests to use their big house as if it were a hotel: and Arthur, on his wife's account, accepted the invitation, although personally he would have preferred plain dishes and plain speech to the best French cooking and the metaphysical diction of Portland Place. Ordinary folk, indeed, accustomed to the English of Shakespeare, were constrained to confess themselves unable to make head or tail of doctrines which —as Lavinia justly observed—were not "meant" for the nourishment of babes and sucklings. One had only to look at the children of the priestess to be convinced of this. Enid, the girl, had come to earth at a time when her mother was proclaiming the non-existence of matter. The child looked like an angel in urgent need of underclothing. When St. Maur, the boy, was born, Lavinia was living upon distilled water, nuts, vegetables, and a wineglassful of olive oil taken morning and evening. Upon both children, therefore, lay the subtle manifestation of the Divine Ego. The boy, however, flaunted bucolic red and white, for Henry Bidgood, tearing himself from the absorbing duties and responsibilities of a philatelist, insisted with brutal violence—so Lavinia declared—upon a diet of beef and mutton.

To these children, living forlornly with a philatelist and a priestess, came Bridget full of delightful plays and tales. Lavinia protested against the fairy tales, being a stickler for what she called the truth, but Bridget was no more to be excluded from the home and hearts of the Bidgood children than sunshine and the perfume of wildflowers from a long-neglected garden.

"I think," said Lavinia, "that little girls cannot learn too soon that dolls are stuffed with sawdust. St. Maur, you don't believe in 'Jack the Giant Killer,' do you?"

"Don't 'sturb me," said the boy (he was just seven), "I am thinking."

"He is thinking," echoed Lavinia, with a glance of triumph at Bridget. "I have trained my children to think, to meditate. They allow their minds to dwell

with rapture upon the Original Good that is within them. Of course, you know that I and my friends repudiate the doctrine of Original Sin."

"What are you thinking of?" said Bridget, touching his curly head.

"Nurse says we have two fathers, an earthly father and an 'evinly father. I s'pose we do have two mothers. And I s'pose," he continued reflectively, "that you, auntie, is my 'evinly mother."

Lavinia turned aside with a pang at her heart and a sense of misgiving. Her children were very dear to her; she never scolded them (you cannot scold sinless ones); she spent a certain portion of each day with them, instilling into them her ideas, well-watered to suit the infant digestion; and yet here, in her own house, a stranger had taken the highest place. Being essentially a woman, she was annoyed also because her husband, the quietest and most reticent of men, professed indiscreet admiration of the Californian. Henry Bidgood had never found anything pleasant to say of the ladies of the Renaissance Club, but Bridget could and did lure his mind from fraudulent issues and water-marks, and his body from the large, dismal library on the ground floor, insisting, with a beguiling obstinacy, that he should join in the children's games, making of him—according to Lavinia—a complete fool; for one afternoon the Priestess of the New Gnosticism, returning from her sanctuary in Albemarle Street at an earlier hour than usual, had found the philatelist draped in a tablecloth and an antimacassar playing the part of a fairy princess, while Enid was sustaining the arduous *rôle* of a robber chief. More, he had relaxed at this Californian's bidding, not only body and mind, but his purse-strings, which, for a man of his large means, were held perhaps too tight.

"You have given them two thousand pounds!" exclaimed his wife, justly indignant.

"Invested it, my dear," replied her husband mildly.

"You do not invest, as you call it, in my schemes,

I suppose, because I cannot guarantee you your paltry three per cent.?"

"That is partly the reason," he returned politely.

Meantime, Fate ordained that Bridget and Max should meet. It chanced that the decoration of the house in Park Street had been entrusted to the firm which employed Max Orpin. Max obeyed orders, and asked no questions. When he was told to fresco a certain ceiling in a certain house, he went about his work quite unaware that the house in question had been leased to Arthur Wyndhurst. The work was to be done in what is technically called *fresco secco*, which requires a very smooth surface. This must be rubbed down with pumice-stone and well wetted with lime and water upon the evening before beginning work. Accordingly, Max presented himself at the house in Park Street at an hour when the other workmen were leaving, at an hour, moreover, when Bridget was in the habit of coming to see what had been accomplished during the day. Bridget, looking up, saw Max, and Max, looking down, saw Bridget, but neither recognised the other till they met upon the same plane, after Max had descended from his platform. Then the man let fall an exclamation, and the woman, partly by instinct and partly from memory, knew that she was face to face with her old playmate.

"It is you—Brownie," she faltered.

The painter eyed her keenly.

"Yes, it is I."

She held out her hand, but he smiled and shook his head, turning his paint-stained hands palm upwards.

"You are——" he hesitated; and Bridget completed the sentence nervously.

"I am Arthur Wyndquest's wife."

Both were ill at ease, but Max was the first to recover his self-possession.

"Then you are Daphne. I did not want to meet you, because—well, now we have met, and that we are alone, I should like to ask you a question."

"Yes?"

"Your father left many papers, no doubt. And possibly you and your sister have been through them. Did you find any mention of me?"

"Not a word." Then, noting his disappointment, she added: "If—if we should find anything of interest, we will let you know."

"I shall be much obliged."

An awkward pause followed. Bridget was sensible that the eyes of the man who laboured hard for his daily bread were appraising her dress, which happened to be particularly smart.

"Good-bye," said Max abruptly. "I shall finish this job, but I daresay we shall not meet again. Our lines lie in very different places."

He turned to climb his ladder; Bridget touched his shoulder.

"Brownie," she said softly, "try to forget for a moment the years that the locusts have eaten. Let me help you! I ask it as a favour. Your pride says 'No,' but you could regard such help as a loan, not to be paid back to me, but to be paid in kind to others."

"The others?" he repeated scornfully. "Do you think that I think of—*others*? Do I look like a philanthropist?" he laughed bitterly; "am I, who could not help myself, a fit person to help others?"

"We can all help each other," said Bridget; "and we all, every one of us, need help, and starve without it. And when the accounting comes, it seems to me that the Judge will determine that one question: Have you helped, or have you hindered? And those like you who drive help from them are hindering."

"Good-bye," said Max, for the second time, and his voice had softened. "Good-bye——Daphne. I shall tell Wyndquest, when I see him, that he is a lucky man."

Then he mounted his ladder, and Bridget, knowing that entreaty would not prevail, left the room and the house.

Sitting in her brougham, she could feel her cheeks

burn with joy, because Max had failed to recognise her as Bridget, with shame also, because expediency whispered that it was well for her peace of mind that her offers of help had been refused. Suddenly she pulled the check-string, and when the carriage stopped and the footman came to the window, she gave him Mrs. Sparling's address in Cadogan Square.

"I greet you with the glad hand," said Mrs. Corny. "I saw your twin at Homburg. She's High, Low, Jack, and the Game—and don't you forget it! She has made a real big splash. Her new name was in the mouths of men and in the society paragraphs."

"Her new name?" said Bridget stupidly.

"Bridget Wyndquest."

"I left my wits in Park Street," Bridget hastened to say. Then she told her friend about the meeting with Max. Mrs. Corny listened sympathetically, noting the things which only women perceive: the shadows in the eyes of the speaker, the nervous movements of the fingers.

"You knew my father very well," said Bridget. "Did he ever speak to you about Max Orpin?"

"Never."

"Who is Max—I wonder?"

"Mercy! we have all asked that question."

"And answered it too," retorted Bridget quickly. "Tell me the answers."

Mrs. Corny glanced queerly at her visitor, with a twist of the mouth and a shrug of the shoulders: protests against a curiosity she deemed unwise.

"My dear," she said gravely, dropping her slang and her odd gestures, "you may have noticed—no, no, you are too young—that I never relight a cigarette. Well, the fumes of stale tobacco are frankincense compared to the odour of a dead and buried scandal."

"You think——"

"What you think. Your father was straitlaced in middle-age, but he may have had the sins of youth to repent of. Max—so the world said—was the incarnation of one of them. I can remember the boy

quite well; a pretty brown-eyed lad. Don't worry; surely you guessed as much as I have told you?"

"No; I never thought of my father as a young man. Then poor Max is——"

"He may be."

"It is horrible," said Bridget vehemently, "that the innocent should suffer for the sins of the guilty."

"But not unintelligible," returned Mrs. Corny, "in a world where heat and light are transmitted. I console myself by reflecting that, inasmuch as I have suffered on account of sins I did not commit, therefore my own offences may be the more lightly dealt with when the time comes. The best of us, I fancy, will be only too glad to seize that recommendation to mercy."

"But the offences of others make us offend, and keep on offending."

Mrs. Corny pricked up her ears. The personal note had the Æolian wail of storm and stress; she responded to it swiftly. People wondered why this stout, bewigged, hard-featured dame was so popular. The secret lay in her cheerful habit of giving more than she received. She was one of the very few who can warm and illuminate—an arc-light and a stove.

"You're in trouble," she said, laying her hand upon Bridget's arm. But Bridget, who spoke glibly to Max of helping and hindering, was loth to practise what she preached. She rose quickly.

"My trouble," she said hastily, "is not one to which I can give words, but if it could be shared with any friend I would share it with you."

When the door had closed behind her visitor, Mrs. Corny shook her head till the yellow curls of her wig were in disorder. Then she lit a cigarette and indulged in some vain speculations.

Bridget drove back to Portland Place and told Arthur that she had met Max, but she said nothing of her troubles and perplexities, and, indeed, was so gay and light-hearted that her husband, for the

second time, questioned her depth of feeling. She had found him tired and discouraged after an unsatisfactory day's work, and dreaded to impose fresh burdens upon a back that at times had the scholar's stoop. A more experienced wife, with a nicer apprehension of Wyndquest's character, might have behaved differently; for worries have this vagabond quality: one may put to flight another, even as you set a thief to catch a thief.

Some few days later Lavinia Bidgood's sister, who had married Lord Maperton, statesman and philanthropist, was dining in Portland Place to meet for the first time Arthur Wyndquest's bride. Lady Maperton was an edition in quarto of her mother, a lady with a figure more comfortable than her creed, who, partly because it was natural to her, and partly because she was the wife of Lord Maperton, took life as if it were a Church of England service without music, and a commination service at that. The two sisters were as different as it is possible for children of the same parents to be. Lavinia had acquired a loose and elastic habit of thought which could adapt itself readily to, let us say, the metaphysical subtleties of a Paul Festus, and the more material idiosyncrasies of a philatelist; whereas Elizabeth, revolving majestically in a circumscribed orbit, busied herself in fitting things and people into a mind as rigid and frigid as a sarcophagus. Her time, which her friends always spoke of as valuable, was spent in the giving of medicine to the poor, advice to the rich, the furthering of foreign missions, the entertainment of colonial and American bishops, a large correspondence, and domestic duties.

Lady Maperton had just returned from a tour in Canada, having been absent at the time of the Romayne wedding, and as she had heard from her sister a rather highly coloured account of the twins, setting forth their wealth and beauty, with not a word concerning the state of their souls, she came to meet Bridget fortified—as she put it to Lord Maperton—

against the allurements of the flesh. None the less, she attacked her dinner with appetite, keeping an austere eye upon her lord, who was likely to pay undue attention to any pretty woman who sat next him. The other guests, making up a party of eight, were Dr. Festus and a certain Miss Luttrell, the author of novels adequately described as "hill-top." It is due to Lavinia to say that she had taken Bridget aside in the morning and deplored the presence of her sister.

"Elizabeth is quite impossible," she remarked lightly, "but you must meet her sooner or later, and unhappily we can't make it later, because she insisted on coming to-night. She complains that the shoe-laces of my mind are always untied; hers are knotted! I am sure she won't like you, my poor darling, because I am so devoted to you; and she will be horribly rude to Paul Festus and Fannie Luttrell, but Fannie never says a word till she has eaten her ice, so I hope we shall get through dinner without a row."

Bridget sat between Lord Maperton—bland and burly, with a plump pink face, congested eyes, and a shining expanse of brow—and Festus, the Apostle of Sinlessness. She was captivated by the apostle's Napoleonic head and distinguished appearance; and he, for his part, seemed as strongly impressed by her beauty; but his talk—a jargon almost unintelligible to the lay mind—gave a disagreeable conviction of insincerity. Before the fish was eaten she told herself that she had never met a stranger whom she disliked and distrusted so much as Dr. Paul Festus.

"I knew your father," he said lightly, realising that the abstractions of the new Gnosticism had no attraction for his companion; "he was one of the finest of the pioneers—a most remarkable man. Do you happen to know what became of a *protégé* of his—a young man by the name of Orpin?"

The name fell on poor Bridget like a bolt from the blue. She was taken so utterly by surprise that she blurted out the exact truth: "Oh yes; he is frescoing the ceiling in our new house."

"Indeed?"

"We supposed him to be dead," said Bridget, crumbling her bread, a betrayal of nervousness which did not escape the eyes of the apostle. "It is very odd. He ran away from Menlo—drifted out of our lives."

"And into them again," said Festus. "Do you call that odd in a world where all movement is centrifugal and centripetal? I suppose you kindly gave him his present employment?"

"N-n-no," Bridget stammered, resenting the interrogation in the apostle's eyes. She was angry because she felt that she could not discuss Max without a sense of shame. Festus discreetly changed the subject; and presently Bridget turned from him to Lord Maperton. From that minute till the ladies rose the statesman had Mrs. Arthur Wyndquest to himself.

"And how does your work prosper?" said Lady Maperton to Wyndquest.

"My novel is at a standstill."

"I am speaking of your work amongst the poor. I cannot call the writing of fiction work. I beg your pardon?" she looked inquiringly at Miss Luttrell, who was muttering something.

"Do you?" said Miss Luttrell coolly. "Well, an apology *is* due, because *I* write novels; it is harder work than district visiting."

"Dear me!" said Lady Maperton. "Speaking to Mr. Wyndquest, my cousin, I allowed myself a latitude of expression which—er——"

"Quite so," said Miss Luttrell. "Yes—champagne."

"What has she written?" said Lady Maperton to Arthur.

"Her latest is entitled 'An Experiment in Scarlet.'"

"Good heavens!"

"You have read it, Elizabeth?"

"Read it? I?" Her voice trembled with indignation. "I should die of shame if such a book were found in my house. And that little girl," she directed a scathing glance at Miss Luttrell, "actually wrote it?"

"That little girl makes two thousand a year," said Arthur, more loudly than he intended.

"And spends three," added Fannie, not looking up from her plate.

Lady Maperton ate her bird in amazed silence, but the doctor, encouraged by Miss Luttrell's confession, and fully alive to the virtue of generosity, began to distract the author of "An Experiment in Scarlet" with a babble of psychic experiences.

"We can indeed look behind the veil," he proclaimed presently. "I recall a most singular experience." He caught the ear of the table, and began a story not without interest and sparkle. When he had finished a little murmur of excitement rippled round the room, and Miss Luttrell said sharply, "May I use that?"

"My raw material is at your service," said the doctor.

"A very curious story," said Bridget. "I read something like it in the San Francisco *Argonaut* two years ago."

Festus, who had obtained the story from this source, smiled blandly.

"Possibly the man who wrote it had heard me tell it."

"I cannot use it now," said Miss Luttrell with asperity.

"I will tell you other stories," whispered Festus.

"Your wife is a striking person," said Lady Maperton to Wyndquest. She had made up her mind to punish Fannie Luttrell by not speaking to her or of her.

"Striking," said the husband who was also a lover, "is not a happy adjective, Elizabeth."

"You know that I pick and choose *my* adjectives. I am true to myself, Arthur, not a flatterer. Is your wife going to help you in your work, your serious work?"

"Help me? She has fired my ambitions. Hasn't Maperton told you? I am going to stand for the Bramshaw division."

He talked with animation of his plans. Lady Maperton nodded her head, keeping a watchful eye

on Lord Maperton, who was listening with an air of profound interest to Bridget's account of Chinese highbinders in San Francisco. When Arthur paused, the august lady said kindly:

"I wish you well, Arthur. I know you are a man staunch and true, although we disagree upon many points. Your marriage worried me, I confess. Lavinia, poor dear creature, laid such unnecessary emphasis upon your wife's money and beauty. These, I feared, might wean your mind from the things which I hold to be vital. Love in its most ardent manifestations would seem to atrophy other energies. With you it seems to have stimulated them. Dear me! Maperton is quite captivated."

"It would seem so," said Arthur, smiling.

"You are not jealous?"

"I don't know," he hesitated. "Not in the sense you mean. It pleases me, for instance, to think that my wife can charm Maperton and Henry Bidgood, two men absolutely different, and my trust in her is such that I cannot conceive myself as being jealous, but if—if a breach of trust were possible, I should take it hard."

Lady Maperton smiled grimly.

"Yes; you would take it hard."

CHAPTER XIII

THE HUSKS OF HOLBORN

THE sight of Bridget in all her bravery—the bravery not only of dress, but of sweet looks and gestures and tones: of a gentle life for which Max had still keen perception, filled the painter's heart with rue, whose leaves have such irritant and inflaming properties. The soul and stomach of the man turned from the husks of Holborn, as his feet, after his work in Park Street was done, moved wearily to them. Pretty was waiting for him, but she too was fagged after a hard day's work, and presented a somewhat slatternly and unlovely appearance. Max eyed her coldly, and ate in silence the coarse food she provided. Presently, as he was smoking his pipe, he said curtly, "I saw Mrs. Wyndquest to-day."

Pretty frowned. She could read now the writing on the wall, interpret the sullen looks of the man whose life was linked with hers. And reading, line upon line, the gloom, the dreariness, and the suffering upon the face of her companion, she was filled with a sudden hatred of the woman who had come—so she unreasonably reflected—between herself and the two men near to her heart.

"D——n Mrs. Wyndquest!" she exclaimed passionately.

"Shut up," replied Max.

What ensued need not be described. The pathos and tragedy of sordid scenes are cheapened by words, even as the oaths, the brutal violence, the hideous abuse of our fellow-creatures weaken, if they do not entirely

destroy, our sympathy and compassion for them. *La bête humaine* appeals most pitifully to us, when we cannot see him or hear him, when we know that he is raging, or lying spent and famished afar off. Face to face he inspires fear and hatred.

The woman attacked the man with tongue and talons. Max defended himself. When the lust of fight was glutted, shame crept back into the hearts of both.

"My God," said Max, "what fools we are!"

"I'm a beast," said Pretty contritely.

So peace reigned once more in 17, Cheape Street, but on the souls as on the bodies of the fighters remained scars.

Max finished the ceiling in Park Street, but he did not see Bridget, She held aloof, calling herself heartless and a coward, but knowing that the man was occupied, she determined to visit Pretty. Wyndquest approved this determination, confessing that he had not been to Holborn, because his mind was not clear as to what was best to be done. The Rev. Andrew Toop, you may be sure, was ready with ring and book, marriage, so he said, being the one thing possible. But Wyndquest was of opinion that what man unlawfully joins together, God often chooses to put asunder. He offered, however, to accompany his wife, but she refused his escort, and insisted upon going along without any guardians save tact and common sense. On her way to Holborn, she stopped at a florist's and bought a big bunch of late roses; flowers being one of the few gifts that the rich can offer to the poor with propriety. Had you questioned her, she would have acknowledged a sense of nervousness, and even impotence. No definite purpose carried her to Cheape Street, only a woman's tenderness, skimming like the wings of a swallow over the stony places. If help were hers to give, she would give it, as she would give her flowers, but Pretty, she felt, would accept flowers, but nothing else. The walk from Portland Place whetted an imagination, at all times singularly vivid and sensitive. Being an American, she was able to apprehend certain

features of London with a detachment denied to the native-born. The palaces of the nabobs, so alike in their massive ugliness, were indeed, she reflected, a monument of the men who had built them, and an epitome of what is best and worst in the Anglo-Saxon. Did they not proclaim the solidarity of the race, and its obedience to convention and tradition, its smug respectability, its steady, stolid adoration of bricks and mortar? As she passed down Oxford Street, she marked the transition from superfluity, as exposed in the shop windows, to the humbler wares of necessity. Her steps quickened, keeping pace with the hurrying crowds; hurrying to what? To the struggle for daily bread. Soon she overtook a splendid figure, a tall, frock-coated, dog-collared, carefully groomed young man, whom she recognised. She passed him swiftly, thinking that leisure alone strolls through life.

Presently she stopped a policeman, and asked for Cheape Street. She was plainly dressed, but the man eyed her askance, noting the lines of her figure and the brilliant face beneath the veil.

"It ain't a fit place for you, my lady," he said deprecatingly, as his massive hand closed over the sixpence she gave him. "It's safe enough," he added in reply to her raised brows, "but—well, it's Cheape Street."

She sped on, the policeman's eyes following her admiringly. "He thinks that I and those like me should keep out of Cheape Street," she said to herself. "And he reflects public opinion. When will it change? When will the English masses see plainly that it is our duty to go everywhere, so that we may see and hear and understand?" Just then she brushed by the curate, whom she recognised at once from Arthur's description of him. The thin, ascetic face looked very stern, and a deep furrow lay between his eyes. Bridget sighed. "Surely," she thought, "smiles, not frowns, should preach the Gospel of Christ. How unhappy and ill he seems to be!"

Pretty opened the door in answer to Bridget's rap

upon the stained panels. She had been working since an early hour, and, although it was not eleven, her eyes were heavy with fatigue. She nodded defiantly, blushing beneath the candid, incurious gaze of her visitor.

"May I come in?" said Bridget softly. "I have brought you these;" she placed the roses in Pretty's hands. Miss Parslow, with a glance such as may have sparkled in the eyes of Dido when she saw the gifts of Eneas, stepped backward, murmuring inarticulate thanks.

"Sit down," she said, in a voice curiously compounded of boldness and bashfulness. There is no *mauvaise honte* about the daughters of the very poor, nor any grovelling awe of rank and wealth, but beauty brings them to their knees. When Bridget lifted her veil, Pretty blushed again, as rosily as any milkmaid.

"Lor'!" she exclaimed, under her breath. Then she hastened to place the flowers in a jar of water, while Bridget took note of the room and its furnishings.

"I saw Max a few days ago," she began.

"He spoke of it," replied Pretty, giving the pronoun its aitch. Bridget marked at once the improvement in accent and intonation, nor did Miss Parslow's veiled air of hostility escape her.

"You are very proud—both of you," said Bridget slowly.

"Proud—of what?" demanded Pretty.

"Of your independence."

"There ain't much else, is there, to be proud of?" She laughed somewhat rudely, and glanced at the sewing machine.

"I shan't go yet," smiled Bridget. "I know that I'm stealing your time, but I want to ask a few questions."

"Oh?"

"Not impertinent questions. You work, don't you, although Max is earning big wages? Well, I want to work too."

"You?"

"I want to paddle my own canoe. My husband has worked here, hasn't he?"

"He's cream laid, he is."

"But he's a man, and we're women. You can tell me things about the women that he doesn't know, that he never can know. And he has spoken to me of your pluck and grit and cleverness. He thinks you a very remarkable person, and he is not easy to please."

"You ain't makin' fun o' me?"

"God forbid!"

Pretty's face softened, and a charming smile curved her lips, leaving two faint dimples in her cheeks.

"Yer lay it on rather thick," she observed.

"I am repeating what my husband says."

"Mr. Wyndquest has been awful good to me," said Pretty slowly, "but I'm a wrong 'un. I've told him so many a time. I know where I'm going. Yus; it ain't to Jerusalem the Golden—not by a dam—I mean," she corrected herself with another blush, "not by a long sight."

"Pretty," said Bridget, after a pause, "I don't think it is given to you or to me to know where we are going in the end, although we may have an idea of the direction, which changes—doesn't it?—many times each day, first up, then down."

"It's down for me," said Pretty, in a hard voice. "Well, I shall find friends to keep me company."

"Yes," murmured Bridget, "whether we rise or fall, we take friends with us. That is the curse or the blessing of life."

Many persons had noticed in Bridget's voice a curious inflection from the major to the minor key, the change to tears from laughter, which is so affecting. Pretty was emotional, like all her class, and possessed what is given to few—a sensitive ear. Now, suddenly, her bosom began to heave. With a violent effort, she controlled her feelings.

"Please go," she said. "I—er—I ain't up to much this morning. I—oh, please go."

Thus entreated, Bridget hesitated. Should she go or stay? The question was nice to determine. Afterwards she regretted that she did not stay. But on the girl's face lay a penitence that a false move might put to flight. So Bridget rose and departed, promising to come again. On the threshold of the room she paused, turned, and gazed anxiously at the head now bending ashamed upon the deal table. Then she crossed the room silently and kissed the soft white nape of Pretty's neck. The girl never moved, and when she looked up a minute later Bridget was gone.

That evening Max finished his ceiling, and came home earlier than usual, with the glow that follows any work well done upon his face and in his heart. He was glad, moreover, although the gladness was inarticulate, that he need go no more to the house in Park Street. And yet he was aware that the incident of meeting one of the twins had helped him, for the head of the firm, inspecting his work on its completion, told him that Mrs. Wyndquest had given the fresco the warmest praise. "And," he added, "as we are anxious to keep you with us, Orpin, we shall raise your—er—salary"—he had used the word "wages" before—"your salary to three pounds a week." This was pleasant news to take home to Pretty, and Max reflected that to Pretty he owed this increasing capacity for work, that without her a mere rise of "ten bob a week" would profit him little, rather the contrary, because alone, with nobody to save for, the extra money would be spent doubtless at music-halls and taverns. The consideration in the voice of his "boss" touched him, too, to issues finer than those involved in the pride and vanity of a craftsman. Why should he not pull himself and Pretty out of the mire altogether? He was earning more than the Rev. Andrew Toop, at any rate, a sweet cud to chew; but his crumpled roseleaf—he laughed to himself because roseleaf was so delightfully inappropriate—his crumpled roseleaf was Mrs. Parslow.

He saw that Pretty was not in her usual spirits, and laid that to the mother's account, for the landing was fragrant of the juice of the juniper, and the time and articulation of certain favourite hymns indicated an ecstatic condition on the part of the singer.

"You look as if you'd had about enough of this," said Max, not unkindly, but with an accent of annoyance.

"Enough of what?" returned Pretty.

The painter turned his thumb in the direction of the bower whence the sounds and odours proceeded.

"I've stood it as long as I can," continued Max. "It is not the presence of what is pleasant, but the absence of what is disagreeable which makes for contentment. I propose that we pull up stakes and shift camp. The rent of this room would pay for a small flat in one of those new buildings. And I don't see why you should work any longer." Then he mentioned the increase of salary, and the bland commendation of his employer. While he spoke Pretty fidgeted with her feet, until Max peremptorily bade her sit still.

"I have one more reason for leaving Cheape Street," he said in conclusion. "I don't want to meet Wyndquest or his wife."

"She came here to-day," murmured Pretty.

"Did she?" he eyed the girl keenly. "Well?"

"Nothing. She's a topper, a tip-topper, she is!"

"And we're at the bottom—eh? But you can bet your life we're not going to stay at the bottom. Great Scott! Listen to that!"

Through the door, which stood ajar, floated the words of one of the hymns which Mrs. Parslow had learned at Sunday-school in her Arcadian youth.

> Abide with me; fast falls the eventide
> The darkness deepens——

Max rushed across the landing. "Shut up!" he shouted. "That's my favourite hymn, and I won't have it mangled by you, old girl. D'ye hear me? Shut up!"

The quavering voice died away, and Max returned to his own hearth, slamming the door of the room with unnecessary violence.

"I ain't going to leave mother," said Pretty. "I don't s'pose," she added, with one of her quips, which always appealed to Max's Western sense of humour, "I don't s'pose the Lord will abide with her; but I shall."

Max frowned.

"Now, look here, Pretty. Don't you be a little fool! What? You'd chuck me, after what I've done for you, on her account? Now, listen to some good horse sense. I've struck a rich lead. It wouldn't surprise me a little bit if I made a sort of name at this fresco business. Oil, perhaps, is not my medium, but I can work in distemper. It suits me. My gift of expression, such as it is, is a light one, and oil was too heavy for it. You *sabe*, don't you?" She nodded, being accustomed to the shibboleth of his profession. Max continued: "Now your mother—I'm not going to mince my words—is a confirmed drunkard and a hypocrite to boot. You might as well try to reclaim the Goodwin Sands as her—and you know it."

"No, I don't," said Pretty sharply.

"Then you ought to know it. But, if it were possible to perform such a miracle, do you think that you and I are going the right way about it? We have taken from her the necessity of work. We pay the rent of her room, we buy her food. She only works now to get money to spend on gin. And she's keeping you with your nose in the gutter."

"If you turn up yours too 'igh you may 'urt yerself."

"Mind your aitches! I'm going to follow my nose, which is my best feature, and doesn't turn up at all, and you're going to follow me."

"Not unless mother comes too."

"I don't want your mother."

"Nor do I neither, but she wants—me."

"But I want you, Pretty. 'I want yer, ma honey, yes, I do.'" He assumed a light tone, but his face was very black.

"Then take mother with me."

"I won't." He began to argue the matter, but Pretty stuck to her point and to her mother, refusing to budge. Finally Max lost his temper.

"Look here," he said roughly; "we may as well settle this business now. I'll give you five minutes to make up your mind. Either you agree to come away with me, or I'll leave you here with your mother. You've got to choose between a drunken old fraud and a man who loves you and is earning three pounds a week. We've come to the cross-roads to-night."

He laid his watch on the table and folded his arms. Pretty grew very white.

"You ain't playin' the game," she faltered.

"One minute gone," said Max coldly. "Mark you Pretty, just as sure as the Lord made little apples, I'm going to take myself out of this room and out of your life in," he looked at the watch, "in just three minutes and a-half, unless you come to your senses."

"It's a cruel shame."

"Two minutes gone."

"Max!" she flung herself upon him, encircling his neck with her arms. "Don't do it, dear; don't arsk me! I'll do anythink for yer. I'll black yer boots." In her agony the poor creature resumed the gutter accent which Max had tried so hard to eradicate. "I know that mother's orful, but I carnt leave 'er."

"You never cared for me," said Max bitterly. "This proves it."

"But I do care now," she pleaded. "I do—I do; may I fall dead if I don't. And—and," her face grew crimson, as the supreme reason for clinging to this man fluttered to her lips, but did not pass them.

"One minute more," said Max.

She turned her face, now streaming with tears, up to his. He looked inexorably at his watch. Let it be remembered that according to his lights he had done much for this woman who refused to follow him, that he was willing to do more, that he reasoned blindly—as a man in his passion does reason—that

her love for him was weak, because her loyalty to her mother was strong.

"Max, Max!" she wailed.

"Time's up," he said coldly, shutting his watch with a loud snap, which echoed in Pretty's ears as if it were the crack of doom.

He moved slowly to the door, but she stood in his path, no longer weeping, but with eyes flashing and fist clenched—the Fury. For a moment they defied each other, the devil in both rising to the surface. Max remembered the horror of their first encounter. If force must prevail, if—he raised his hand as she flew at him. Now a man, even if he be ignorant of the elementary principles of self-defence, rushes at his antagonist chin down, protecting those two vital spots, the point of the jaw and the throat beneath. But a woman runs chin up at her foe. And so it came to pass that Max's fist struck hard on a soft white throat. The blow had the thud of murder in it. Pretty reeled backwards lying lifeless and limp where she fell. The man's hot anger turned to ice as he gazed at the pitiful heap. Then he picked her up and carried her to the bed. But seeing that she never moved, he laid his ear against her bosom, listening intently for the beat of her heart. When he raised his head his complexion was the colour of ashes and his lips were trembling, the lips of a coward. His eyes sought furtively the door, then the window.

The fear of Death had him in its grip. He began to pant, as if the hounds of the law were at his heels. He no longer thought of her, but of himself, hearing in fancy the hoarse cry of the accuser—Thou art the Man. Sweat broke out upon his forehead. And then, by the merest chance he caught sight of his face in the sorry mirror upon the wall. "You cur," he gasped between set teeth, "you cur!" He hurried to the bed and again bent over the pallid face upon the pillow. His only thought, now, in the reaction of spirit upon body, was the saving of her life, not his own. "I

must fetch a doctor," he muttered, with his finger upon the pulseless wrist; "she can't be dead." As if in answer to his words, the pulse flickered and began to beat, the bosom heaved.

"She is alive!" he cried.

When consciousness returned, he entreated her pardon, and soon she slipped from the bed and began to prepare the evening meal, assuring Max, with a faint smile on her white face, that she was none the worse for the encounter.

"I began it."

"And I nearly ended it," said Max. Then he confessed that he had thought her dead and himself a murderer.

"We *must* leave now," he added. "The horror of this room is in my bones. I'll find a flat to-morrow and we'll take the old girl with us."

"Oh Max!"

"I believe you do care for me a little bit."

She kissed him, and whispered something.

"My God!" he exclaimed; "and I struck you. Why didn't you tell me at once?"

"I c-c-couldn't. I thought it would make you angry. It means another mouth to feed and——"

"My poor Pretty!"

What was best in him was bubbling and fermenting, leavening the coarse meal. A male of her own class would have received Pretty's nervous whisper with a brutal laugh or a heart-breaking curse. Max was tender and sympathetic—all that a man should be at such a time; and the unexpectedness of it stirred Pretty to the core, transmuting affection into love gilding the leaden hours of the past and the shadows of the future.

Two days later they moved into another lodging, and Cheape Street knew them no more. Bridget and Wyndquest, calling together, learned that they had flitted, leaving no address. Such flittings are common amongst the poor, who cling, like birds, to old nests, foul though they may be, and then quite suddenly

desert them and build elsewhere. Wyndquest might have learned from the firm who employed Max the painter's address, but this did not occur to him. He was busy installing himself in a new house, finishing his book, preparing to enter Parliament, and had undertaken a series of lectures in the North. He told Bridget that his circle had widened, that his efforts in the future must be made on behalf of the many instead of the few : a gospel to which Bridget hearkened, with a faint smile on her lips.

At the beginning of December Lord Quest fell ill of influenza, which speedily developed into pleurisy and inflammation of the lungs. Arthur went to see him before the disease entered the critical stage. When he said good-bye, the old man mumbled a few words. Arthur bent over him. "We have had some pleasant games of piquet together," the uncle whispered feebly.

"We shall have many more, I hope," said Wyndquest.

Lord Quest shook his head.

"I have played too many games already," he muttered, "and I have played most of them badly. Keep an eye on Anthony."

Wyndquest went away very sad. The shadows of death lay upon his uncle's face, but the shadows of a life which had proved sour instead of sweet, barren rather than fruitful, lay there also.

Three days after he died, and his son reigned in his stead.

CHAPTER XIV

PROSPERITY

AMONGST her father's papers, in the desk he had always used, which now stood in her sitting-room in Park Street, Bridget found an old diary. To some men, by nature reticent and secretive, the necessity of expression is too strenuous to be altogether resisted. Godfrey Romayne, at a time in his life when he wanted a friend, had found no confidant other than a note-book. In a small vellum-bound volume he had set down certain sentences. They were few in number and simply worded. Perhaps this simplicity lent pathos to them in the eyes of his daughter.

Miriam has left me, taking her boy. I shall not see her again—thank God! She never understood me nor I her. And yet she was mine—mine—for how long? I ask myself: Have I treated her justly? And I am too bruised mentally and morally to answer the question. . . .

Now that time has adjusted my scales, I can swear that I treated Miriam not ungenerously. It is strange that I, who have a sure judgment in regard to men, should blunder so pitifully about women. I am a serf to mere outward appearance. Even now her brown eyes seduce me. . . . I have just destroyed her portrait. I trampled on it like a maniac. I am in the mood when I could wear a hair shirt. . . .

I have just learned that Miriam is dead. It is incredible. Her boy has been sent to me. I shall do what I can for him, because, despite all that has passed, he has his mother's eyes. . . .

Bridget put away the diary, touching it reverently,

as if it were a sacred link between her and the cold austere man whom she had called father. When she read the passages to her husband, he said slowly: "Your father was a man of feeling."

"Would you judge from this that Max is his—son?"

"He is careful not to say so," said Wyndquest; then, seeing the relief in Bridget's eyes, he added abruptly: "All the same it was evidently his wish that the boy should be provided for."

Bridget said nothing.

Eighteen months passed rapidly, bringing to Daphne a little daughter, and other joys and triumphs connected with the drawing-room rather than the nursery. Mousie Quest—as she was now known to an ever-increasing circle of smart friends—had made her mark in a world easily impressed by beauty and rank and gold. She was popular because, as Mrs. Corny said, she was prosperous and liked what others did, although she never did what others liked, unless it was pleasing also to her. Some ill-natured persons, it is true, spoke evil of her, but these for the most part had no claims to consideration. Mousie herself—she had almost forgotten that her name had once been Daphne—smiled sweetly at her enemies, and turned to them the prettiest cheek in London—to be kissed. The Dowager, who was living in the Dower House at Quest, shook her head whenever the name of her sparkling daughter-in-law was mentioned. She had been bitterly disappointed when a girl was born. "That woman," she would say solemnly, "has no sense of duty."

Chips was still ignorant of the fraud perpetrated in the pleasant woods of Bracknell. Daphne entreated Bridget to keep the secret, pleading the coming of the baby as an excuse; and, when it came, her too protracted weakness. It might be said of her what Milton said of another: she alleged the uprightness of her intentions to excuse her failings.

"You know I mean so well," she would say to Bridget.

So Bridget went on walking through life with peas in her shoes.

The sisters seldom met. Once at Quest a rat ran across the billiard-room. From a child Daphne had been terrified of rats. On this occasion she jumped on to a chair, screaming, "Bridget, Bridget!" Two or three persons were present, who took no note of the exclamation, but Daphne was more frightened by the slip of her tongue than by the rat. A similar incident happened in London. The sisters were driving with Mrs. Sparling, when a hansom crashed into them. Again Daphne called her sister by the name of Bridget, much to the amazement of Mrs. Corny. After this second blunder Daphne told herself that she and her twin must remain apart.

Often Bridget asked herself if marriage had brought her all she had expected. Mrs. Corny held that marriage must surpass expectation before it can be pronounced successful. One thing was certain: Arthur and she were afloat upon a springtide of prosperity. The famous gold mine belonging to the twins had been turned into a limited liability company, of which both Quest and Arthur were directors. The Romayne properties in and around San Francisco had been sold, and the large sums obtained for them invested in negotiable securities. Arthur had taken infinite pains with these financial matters, and association with bankers and brokers had whetted a certain interest in the money-market. He had speculated in his youth, and lost all his money. He refused to speculate with his wife's money, but he was allured by the excitement of administering it to the best of his ability. The comparative failure of his second novel, which lacked—so the critics said—the freshness and originality of the first, had seemed to palsy his literary activities. "What is the matter with Wyndquest?" said the men, who had seen in *The Samaritans* such extraordinary promise. "He has married a rich wife," replied the world, with a sly sneer at genius in golden fetters. The world, as usual, was half right. Bridget's money enabled her

husband to enter Parliament, it drove him to the City, it substituted new for old interests, and it hedged him about with conventions. Wyndquest, in fine, to use a homely metaphor, had given up the retail for the wholesale trade. He was held to be the Elisha upon whose shoulder the mantle of Lord Maperton would fall. You may be sure that Lavinia Bidgood and her friends of the Renaissance Club used him as a peg on which to hang their philanthropical reforms.

"Do you enjoy these meetings?" said Bridget to him, as they were driving from a *séance*, which one enlightened spinster had described as —— precious! Lavinia had been speaking upon that absorbing subject: *The Advance of the Undeveloped Mind against the Lines of Least Resistance.* Arthur had spoken also.

"You disliked Lavinia's speech?"

"I thought it preposterous. I love Lavinia as woman, but as priestess she is contemptible. This travelling along the lines of least resistance seems to resolve itself into eating, drinking, and talking—such talking! Flapdoodle—what fools are fed on."

"Did you dislike my speech, too?"

"Weren't you borrowing Maperton's thunder? He thinks money can accomplish everything."

"He has done good with his money."

"So he tells us."

"Look at the results."

Bridget shrugged her shoulders. Maperton was for ever talking of *results*. He floated his arguments on statistics, a seething flood of figures upon which comment and criticism were swept away.

"Are you losing interest in me?" he said.

She caught him by the hand. "No no!" she exclaimed.

He pressed her hand reassuringly. "But you *are* losing interest in what I am doing. And you urged me to do it."

She sighed, making no reply. Arthur was making his mark in the House of Commons, but he had no time to spend in Stepney. His active work there

and in Poplar had been taken up by Bridget. She had told herself that it was a duty. When he was lecturing in the North and electioneering she, so far as she was able, had carried on and out his minor schemes and plans. She had built and endowed a refuge for friendless girls, known as the Wyndquest Home; she gave many hours to the Charity Organisation; she subscribed to Fresh Air Funds and Missions; but these were sops to a conscience which craved other food.

"Are we pinched by prosperity?" Arthur asked; then he continued quickly: "I was cruelly pinched by poverty."

As he spoke the carriage stopped in front of Wyndquest House, and the footman opened the door. Arthur turned to his wife as he stepped from the brougham. "We will talk of this again," he said.

CHAPTER XV

FLAPDOODLE—"WHAT FOOLS ARE FED ON"

FOLLOWING his wife up the staircase, Wyndquest recalled that evening two years before when he had met her for the first time. The young Viscountess had been allowed to do what she liked with the big, gloomy house in Grosvenor Square upon the understanding that she left Quest alone. The result, to those who admire the modern system of furnishing and mural decoration, justified the large sums which had been spent, but the general effect, as Wyndquest remarked, was slightly chaotic. If the inside of a house furnishes a clue to the characters of those who dwell in it, this home indicated much that was not flattering. As Mrs. Cornelius Sparling observed: "This is a palace—of varieties."

Freaks were present in force, but, being smart freaks, challenged no particular attention on the score of appearance. Lavinia Bidgood and Dr. Festus, for instance, had come on together from the Renaissance Club, but none would have guessed from their dress or deportment that one was the priestess of the New Gnosticism and the other the great apostle of sinlessness. They greeted Arthur and his wife with effusion.

"We slipped away after your speech," said Lavinia. "It was very distinctive."

"Of what?" demanded Bridget.

"Of himself. Arthur is advancing; he is moving fast."

"I should like to meet somebody who is moving slow," said Bridget softly.

"I shall send you my paper on sense-realism," said Lavinia irrelevantly.

"I am writing myself on nonsense-realism," replied Bridget, smiling. She liked to chaff Lavinia. Festus coughed discreetly.

"Mrs. Wyndquest," he observed blandly, "does not quite understand her relation to the world of thought and action in which she is entitled to so high a place."

Bridget glanced at the apostle coldly, and passed on. Mrs. Corny was beckoning from a snug corner. Arthur remained with his cousin. In the distance Daphne was receiving her many friends. Arthur saw that the Americans were well represented, particularly those who had married Englishmen of rank. He also recognised, somewhat to his surprise, two women whom he had reason to know were detested by the honest Chips—Birdie Hope and Lady St. Cross. Lavinia Bidgood followed his eyes and thoughts, and laughed.

"Mamma would have a fit, if she could see them here," she murmured, "and yet, Arthur, I do not believe one-half the stories about them—poor dears."

"You are always kind," he replied warmly. His cousin's faith in good, so strong as to blind her to the existence of evil, appealed strongly to all who came in contact with her.

Meantime Mrs. Corny was talking to Bridget. "I am a good American," she said, "that's why I come to London—to meet my compatriots. Your sister, my dear, does her duty only too well." She winked at Festus.

"He doesn't come to my house," said Bridget.

Mrs. Corny raised her lorgnette. "Great Scott!" she muttered, catching sight of the bare back of Lady St. Cross.

"Lovely little frock," said Bridget, giving Mrs. Corny to understand that she would rather not discuss the person inside it.

"Frock? Yes—yes, I *can* see it. As you say—lovely and little! Your sister looks very wideawake. Chips, I see, is rubbing his eyes. It's curious—isn't it? Marriage so often is a state where one wants to sit up and the other to lie down. Well, my dear, you,

I am told, keep a school for saints in some place to which the cabfare is half a crown, and your twin keeps a school for sinners. By-the-bye, what has become of Max Orpin?"

"What brings him to your mind?"

"The sight of the apostle."

"Why?"

"My dear, it is a queer story. Festus and I crossed the ocean together last week. He had been to San Francisco, so he told me—I don't believe a word he says—and then he tried to pump me about you and your father, and finally he mentioned Max. Bother! Here is somebody coming. I shall be at home to-morrow at five. If you have no better engagement, come and try my new brand of tea."

The house by this time was full, and the different entertainments—the dancing Japs, the Coon Dogs, the Whistling Finches, etc.—were succeeding each other in the ballroom. Bridget had a couple of words with Daphne, and was then carried off by Chips to the dining-room.

"Regular Zoo," he said, with a laugh that was not mirthful.

"Everybody seems amused except you."

"They pretend. We all pretend. What rot it is!"

"Chips—you are chippy."

"Pooh! I'm only sleepy. Who is Napoleon?"

"That is Dr. Festus. Evidently you don't go to the Renaissance Club."

"I'd sooner go to bed," Chips retorted. "I snore—so I'm told—in both places. So that's the apostle—hey? Well—half the people here are strangers to me; and I'm glad of it. Mousie says she wishes her house to be representative, and it is; we have 'em all—Turks, heretics, infidels, jumpers—counter-jumpers—and Jews, as the song says. I'm going down to Quest to-morrow, to get the taste of it out of my mouth. Well, here we are; what will you have to eat?"

He found a small table, and they sat down.

"You spend a good deal of time at Quest," said Bridget.

"I spend my time in the country and Mousie spends her money in town, so we are quits."

Bridget did not smile. She was only too well aware that Chips went his way and Daphne went hers.

"Mousie and I," continued the young man, "have had a row to-night. You needn't wrinkle your pretty forehead about it. It's not the first by a long chalk, and won't be the last, but I want you to speak to her. She must pull in, or we'll go to blazes. The Death Duties hit me hard, as you know, and now she's taken to gambling. Not Bac—nothing so harmless—but Kaffirs. She dropped five thou. yesterday. One of her precious friends persuaded her to invest heavily in the Rand, and Maperton tells me there's going to be a big fight in South Africa. That means a big slump."

Bridget promised to speak. She did not like to add that she and her twin had amiably agreed to disagree upon matters that each considered vital.

"It's a rum go," she heard Chips saying, "but I thought that you, Daphne, would have played this very game which Mousie finds so exciting. I thought you a bit—skittish. I married Mousie thinking that she would help me pull the family 'bus. By Gad! It's a tandem we're driving; and she's on the lead, with a jibber between the shafts. There you have it."

After supper, many of the guests went on to a dance in a house hard by, and many, including the Wyndquests, went home to bed, but some remained, and amongst these was the apostle of sinlessness, cool and bland. Mrs. Bidgood had procured for him an invitation to Wyndquest House, and he had noted, with a vain man's observation of such details, that Lady Quest's eyes lingered with interest upon a face which most women found attractive. Throughout the evening he studied her, and, finally, when opportunity served, addressed her.

"You have given us a delightful entertainment," he murmured.

Daphne, thinking that he wished to bid her good-night, held out her hand. "I am so glad you have found it pleasant."

"We are compatriots," said Festus, smiling.

Daphne was reflecting that the speaker had wonderful eyes.

"So Mrs. Bidgood tells me. I am always charmed to see my fellow-countrymen at my house, particularly," she added graciously, "when they have such claims to consideration as Dr. Festus."

"You are very kind," murmured the apostle.

Daphne began to wonder why he did not shake her hand and go.

"I have a matter of importance I wish to discuss with you, Lady Quest." Daphne raised her brows. "When," he continued in his languid voice, "when would it be convenient for you to give me five minutes?"

"You are here, I am here; what is this matter of importance?"

"It shall be told now, if you wish it."

A derisive inflection arrested her interest. She moved to a divan piled high with cushions, and sank into its depth. Festus plunged into the other corner, with the air of a man who lets himself go.

"I have just returned from San Francisco," said he.

"Indeed?"

"Yes; I went there partly on your account."

"On my account?" Daphne opened her eyes very wide. The apostle, she reflected, must have gone mad. "That was kind of you," she added politely.

"Pray don't mention it! I went also on my own."

"Please go on."

"I may shock and distress you." He smiled insinuatingly.

"Go on," said Daphne. She was assured that he had something hateful to say.

"I knew your father," began Festus; "a remarkable man—a man of great executive ability and a man of

conscience. He was also, you will pardon me saying it, an extraordinarily secretive man."

"Come to the point, Dr. Festus."

"He died intestate. And, according to the laws of California, his property, a very large property," the doctor mouthed the words as if he were tasting a peculiarly rich and piquante sauce, "was divided between you and Mrs. Wyndquest."

"Well?"

"Unhappily, it was not known then, nor, my dear Lady Quest, is it known now, except to me—except to me," he repeated, "that another child with prior claims was alive. Mr. Romayne was twice married; once to your mother, and once to a kinswoman of mine. You may remember a boy who lived with you at Menlo. That boy was your half-brother, born in wedlock, as I am prepared to prove."

"Good gracious!"

The apostle's face was suffused with a glow—the efflorescence, so to speak, of personal sinlessness.

"And in the eyes of the law he is the heir. Mr. Romayne married your mother at Grace Church, San Francisco, in the presence, so the *Bulletin* informs me, of a large and fashionable congregation, but the ceremony was null and void, because his first wife was then living, as I can prove, as—I—can—prove."

"I don't believe it," said Daphne, rising. "Anything more, Dr. Festus, that remains to be said, had better be told to my solicitors."

The apostle smiled more blandly than before.

"I understand," he murmured, "and sympathise with your agitation and—er—indignation. And I shall not call upon your solicitors for a week."

He bowed gracefully, and went his way.

CHAPTER XVI

THE APOSTLE OF SINLESSNESS

FESTUS walked home to his lodgings in one of those small streets adjoining Piccadilly, which would seem to have been specially designed for the shelter and comfort of single men. And it occurred to him—as it had often occurred before—when he marked the softly shaded sitting-room, the luxurious chairs, the subtle harmonies of vellum-bound books, ivory-tinted prints, and a wallpaper of seductive green, that Fortune had been kind to him. So musing, he lit a cigar and poured himself out a whisky and Apollinaris. Then he sat down, smiling, anticipating the delights of a chat with an appreciative listener, for he had acquired the habit of talking to himself. Some people, presumably, talk to themselves because they can find no one else to listen to them. Festus talked to himself because talk was his trade, and he knew that it behoved him to keep his tongue, as a pianist keeps his fingers, flexible. From the depths of his chair he could see a fine engraving of the Countess Potocka, and upon this he fastened his eyes with a curious insistent gaze.

"You will not keep me waiting a week, my beautiful Viscountess," he murmured, addressing the portrait.

La Potocka smiled mysteriously from the shadows.

"You mock me," whispered the apostle. "That is always unwise."

The smoke from the cigar began to obscure the outlines of the picture. Out of the soft green background peered the alluring face.

"You will send for me," continued Festus dreamily;

"and then, in turn, I shall send for you. And you will come. Oh yes; you will come."

Upon the green walls were other portraits of other women: some of them were signed photographs, but for these the apostle had neither word nor glance. Many of the more daintily bound books upon the table had been given to him by the hands which signed the photographs; his gold matchbox and cigarette case were offerings from Sheba to Solomon; but the sight of these precious objects hardly stirred his gratitude and left his fancy cold.

Paul Festus, indeed, amongst other good qualities, had the faculty of forgetting everything and everybody unconnected with the desires and ambitions of the passing minute. This was a distinguishing trait of the great Napoleon and of other famous men, but Napoleon is named because the apostle of sinlessness believed himself to be physically and mentally a man of destiny, although his victories so far had been in the field of Venus rather than Mars. In the doctor's youth—when he served his apprenticeship on the staff of a San Francisco daily newspaper—his "copy" had been peculiarly yellow with the bile of the Anglophobe, Knowing only the seamy side of Western life, he had been able to write with the most convincing inaccuracy of England and English affairs. Now, calling himself cosmopolitan, he was Anglophile; his gall, beneath the smiles of Lavinia Bidgood and other dames, having been turned into milk and honey. At the Scribblers, or the Buskin, or any other literary and dramatic clubs, Festus was known as an after-dinner orator, in whose care it was safe to entrust the destinies of the two great English-speaking peoples. According to him England's kin beyond sea were extending the glad hand to the old folks at home. At the bidding of the prophet (Festus, being a modest man, forbore to mention the prophet's name), the waters of the Atlantic would part. Columbia and Britannia, mother and long-lost daughter, would meet halfway and embrace, united for ever—the other nations, when the waters divided, would be

submerged! Fair critics were fain to confess that the prophet was an agreeable and intelligent person, who saw no evil in others, because he himself was without guile.

Unhappily, a prophet must be fed three or four or five times a day, and in a degenerate age this task cannot be entrusted to ravens, unless we consider as such the black-coated attendants who hover around us when at meat. Paul Festus, as Christian Scientist, denied the existence of matter, but he was nice in all that concerned the inner man, and protested piously against coarse or ill-cooked fare, a corked bottle, or a cigar that did not come from Habana. These good things, and the others which go with them, had dropped like manna upon his head. He had come to London at a time when earnest thinking men and women were willing—and generally able—to pay handsomely the teacher and preacher of what was New. An eloquent stranger demonstrating that sin was not, could name his own terms. Of late, however, public and private interest in sinlessness had waned. Another gentleman from America, equally eloquent, began to startle London with some lectures upon Diabolism; and in a world where one's neighbours would sooner talk about sinners than saints this new Chrysostom had an immense following.

Festus, poor fellow, began to think that his occupation was gone, and so thinking philosophically resigned himself to the lethe of marriage with a rich and adoring elderly spinster, Miss Matilda Bosman, whom he had met at the Renaissance Club. This lady was neither wise nor beautiful, but Festus told himself that she was appreciative, and not without charm, the charm of an old portrait by an obscure artist, out of drawing and faded, yet placid and pleasant to look on. He wooed in haste, being determined to marry at leisure, and the lady who would have liked to reverse this process complained when her Paul announced the necessity of a trip to California, while withholding reasons for a departure as ill-timed as it was sudden. Festus made light of the

perils of the journey, and inflamed the lady's curiosity. Finally, to extinguish this, he was constrained to tell a lie, which, to do him justice, he told unwillingly, being well aware that an apostle does not lie if he can avoid it.

"Matilda," he said solemnly, "our union has for me certain pains and penalties."

"For you, Paul?"

"For me, dearest. You bring not only yourself—what man could ask for more?—but your," his sonorous voice sank to a whisper—"your money."

"You—you despise money!"

"No, Matilda, I do not despise your money. The fact that it is yours sanctifies it. You offer me the wine of life in a golden chalice. I have wine to offer you, but no chalice."

"Ah, Paul—how noble you are! I understand. You are going to California to make money, to—to"—metaphor did not come easily to her—"to find your chalice. As if," she blushed, "as if we could not drink, you and I, out of the same cup."

Festus kissed her forehead.

When he went aboard at Liverpool he found that his state-room had been changed. In lieu of a stuffy half-interest in an inside, main-deck cabin, he found himself sole tenant of a suite of rooms upon the promenade deck. This had been arranged by his Matilda as a surprise, and the apostle was duly grateful, embalming his gratitude in a letter which the spinster carried in—a place that it would be indiscreet to mention.

It is time now to relate the true reason of his visit to California. Miss Bosman might have reflected that golden chalices are not found even in a golden State lying upon the seashore, and her lover had assured her that six weeks would restore him to her arms. Allowing four weeks for the journey, only a brief fortnight was left wherein to find the chalice, but such addition and subtraction were not to Miss Bosman's taste—she was a woman who blundered in elementary arithmetic.

Festus was the brother of the Miriam of Godfrey Romayne's diary. He had, however, forgotten Max's

existence till he met Bridget at Henry Bidgood's house. When he saw Bridget he wondered if any provision had been made for Max. Her answer to his question disposed of any such probability. Romayne had believed the boy to be dead. Later it occurred to him that he had struck, as miners say, a good lead. If he could prove—and the proving of problems hitherto undemonstrable was his strong point—Max to be the lawful son of his presumptive father, an immense sum of money might change hands, some of which, surely, would stick to his. Obviously the first thing to do was to satisfy himself as to what manner of man Max was, and what his life might be. He knew that the young fellow had painted the ceiling of Wyndquest's new house, and it was easy to find out the name of the firm which employed him. Grass had little time to grow beneath the apostle's feet. On the day following the dinner-party he found himself in Cheape Street, and there learned all that he wanted to know without seeing Max or Pretty. His handsome eyes sparkled as he walked out of Holborn. A Bohemian struggling beneath burdens would be as clay in the hands of the potter.

Meantime he had work in London which could not be neglected; but he determined to pay a visit to California. This, however, was not possible till the late spring of the following year. His plans had been matured, and if realised were the equivalent of liberty and independence. It is fair to Festus to mention that he had no intention of marrying his Matilda save under the pressure of ironclad necessity. He was American enough to wish to paddle his own canoe as long as possible—and he loved excitement.

In California, Festus found what he sought (you can find anything in the world if you know how to search for it), and then, armed for what he told himself would be his greatest campaign, he returned to London. Here he learned that the Orpins had moved from Cheape Street. Festus betook himself once more to the firm in Tottenham Court Road. The manager said that

Orpin was still in their employ, and a civil clerk wrote out his address: 143, Kenyon Buildings, Chelsea. Festus put the slip of paper into his pocket-book, but he had no intention of seeking out Max till he had seen Daphne. He had heard much of Daphne from his friend and disciple, Mrs. Bidgood. Lavinia promised to take him with her to the approaching entertainment at Wyndquest House.

Now as he lay back in his chair, with his eyes upon the portrait by Angelica Kauffmann, he was comparing the respective charms of Lady Quest and Matilda Bosman. The apostle was susceptible and sentimental —where the fairer sex is concerned, what good man is not?—but, alas! the charms of Miss Bosman had become sublimated by age. He recalled his reception— the pressure of a thin nose upon his cheek, the tears trickling from a pair of faded eyes, the nervous, trembling clutch of her slender fingers—and, in alluring apposition, the tinted Venus of Grosvenor Square!

"I am a strong man," said Festus, rising from his chair, "but I have my weakness."

Next day he marched slowly to the Kenyon Buildings. The sun was declining as he approached the huge block, and an unusually hot afternoon had left most living creatures limp. The plants in the windows were wilting in the glare; the children lay in the shadows, waiting for the breeze which soon would sweep up the river, bringing with it life and laughter; the men returning from work were slinking to the public-houses; the women, with supper to cook and serve, were bending over their stoves. Festus could smell the fried fish, that dreadful greasy odour which seems to lie like a blight upon the lodgings of the London poor.

He climbed the stairs, holding a scented handkerchief to his nose, and tapped upon the door of 143. Mrs. Parslow opened it, curtseying deeply when she marked the distinguished appearance of the stranger. Festus eyed her moist lips and inflamed complexion; then he asked if Max were at home.

"He ain't doo yet," whined Mrs. Parslow.

Just then a voice was heard singing a popular song :

> I'm in love with Nancy,
> Nancy does entrance me!
> And some day you will find
> I shall arsk her to be my wife—
> If her 'usband doesn't mind!

"That's my gal a-singin' to 'er baby," observed Mrs. Parslow. "I used ter sing—'ymns, if you please, sir, only 'ymns—but I 'av'n't 'ad the 'eart to sing lately."

"Can I see your daughter?"

Mrs. Parslow conducted the stranger into a small sitting-room, sniffing loudly to invite questions and, haply, charity.

"And what do you do for a living?" said Festus.

"Nothink. And you carn't get a taste out o' nothink."

The apostle ignored the hint while approving the sentiment. Then the old woman moved slowly away to summon Pretty ; and Festus was left alone with his thought, which must have been unconnected with fried fish, for he smiled pleasantly. When Pretty entered, the smile still lingered upon his Napoleonic face, and even widened as he noted her hair and teeth. At Pretty's invitation he accepted a chair.

"Max will be in directly," said Pretty.

"Your husband?"

Pretty flushed, but nodded her head, wondering whether the emphasis on "husband" was an impertinence or not.

"You are happy and contented here?" continued Festus.

The independent poor of London dislike questions from strangers.

"'Appy as larks," said Pretty shortly. In the presence of Max she minded her aspirates ; in his absence they took care of themselves.

"Your mother doesn't seem happy," murmured Festus.

"Some of us wants the 'ole earth and a little bit outside to plant pertaters in," replied Pretty defiantly.

"Did you give mother anything? Money, I mean? No? Well, don't!"

"I won't," replied Festus firmly.

"I thought at first," said Pretty, "that you was come here to give advice or money, and we don't want neither. No offence!"

"None has been taken."

"You've come to see Max about a job, I expect?"

"About—a job," repeated the apostle thoughtfully. He was not quite at his ease, having, indeed, but small experience in dealing with the poor. His relations with suffering and poverty-stricken humanity were confined to the perusal of occasional pamphlets and articles in the reviews. He read these with no more strictly defined purpose than a desire to talk about them afterwards with ladies of his acquaintance.

"Max has been busy lately," said Pretty. "Frescoing's fashernable."

These last remarks being punctuated by the fretful wail of her baby, Pretty fled from the room, and an instant later reappeared, carrying the child in her arms, and crooning to it. Festus noted that the infant seemed sickly.

"Nancy ain't strong," said the mother hastily, kissing the small yellow face.

"But Nancy is your fancy?"

"You 'eard me singin'. Yes; Nancy is my fancy."

She bent a loving face over the child, soft and tender and youthful. But when Max entered a moment later the expression hardened; a change which did not escape the eyes of the apostle.

"This gentleman has come to see you," said Pretty.

Max nodded. "All right! Take the kid away—and don't let it howl!" Then he turned an irritable face to Festus. "If that confounded smell of fish annoys you, pray smoke," he said. The apostle drew forth a handsome cigar case.

"If you will join me," he murmured. When the cigars were drawing properly, he added: "I am Dr.

Festus, assistant editor of the *Gnostic*, and an old friend of the late Godfrey Romayne."

"Yes?"

"By what some call chance, by what I hold to be the dictates of destiny, we have at last—met."

He paused, with dramatic instinct. Max regarded him coldly.

"Your mother," continued the apostle, "was—a friend of mine."

This piece of information startled the painter.

"Have you any papers, certificates, and so forth, relating to your parents?"

"Not a line. To be frank with you, I never knew who my parents were. I was educated by Godfrey Romayne."

"You allowed Godfrey Romayne to think you dead. That was not wise."

"I am not wise," said Max. "Tell me the names of my parents."

Festus held up a smooth white hand, with a deprecating gesture much admired by the ladies of the Renaissance Club.

"Softly!"

Max shook his head irritably, and murmured something that was not a blessing. "If there is anything to tell, tell it."

"Your mother's name was Miriam Orpin," said Festus. "The Orpins and—er—my people crossed the plains together in '52, and settled down in the Santa Clara Valley. Your mother was a pretty girl; you have her eyes."

"And nothing else," said Max grimly.

"Something of your father's manner," suggested the doctor. "He was Godfrey Romayne."

"I suspected as much," said Max gloomily.

"Cheer up, my dear fellow. You are thinking, I daresay, that if you had preserved instead of destroying your identity, Godfrey Romayne would doubtless have provided for you. True; and in that case he would have made provision also for your half-sisters, Lady

Quest and Mrs. Arthur Wyndquest. Fortunately for you, he died intestate."

"Eh?"

The doctor expounded the law.

"What! The second marriage invalid? I have a claim to the whole!" Max began to raise his voice.

"Hush! We cannot expect to get the whole, and we will advertise the facts to the world at a more fitting time, and in—er—a more fitting place. Yes, you have a *claim* to the whole."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Max. "Is it possible the luck has turned?"

"I hope so," said the apostle, devoutly, thinking of his depleted exchequer and some outstanding debts. "But, my dear boy, a claim to such a fortune as that left by your father cannot be substantiated, or even pressed, without the expenditure of money—much money. Your case is somewhat similar to the famous Aron case. Senator Aron, you remember, left an immense fortune, and a fortune was spent by his children in proving that a certain woman was not legally married to their father. Your half-sisters would possibly spend as much in defence of their property."

"You have not come here," said Max bluntly, "to tell me that the grapes are out of reach. You have a plan; what is it?"

Then Festus waxed eloquent, warming to his work when he spoke of what was at stake. Beneath the froth and sparkle of words lay the rocks of fact; the struggle for life in Kenyon Buildings and all that life implied. Max had often dreamed of Pactolian sands: he had speculated with pleasure upon what he would do, if he were rich!—a favourite amusement of the poor, a variety entertainment open day and night, particularly at night. After the apostle had taken his leave, promising to call again in the immediate future, Max sat on smoking and thinking. One by one the lines upon his still youthful face softened and vanished. The fretful cries of the baby, the odour of the fish, the sorry furnishings, touched his senses, it is true, but

made no impress. The artist was far away, skirting the coral reefs of Tahiti, hearing the boom of the great combers as they broke upon the beach, seeing the palms and mimosas, inhaling the perfumes of the tropics, borne upon the white wings of fancy across summer seas, over flowering steppes, through cool, silent forests, on and on, leaving behind him, like the reek of a swift-steaming vessel, the sooty past which floated away, fading and vanishing in the golden glow of the future.

Presently Pretty came in, and stared apprehensively at the smiling brooding face.

"Max."

He gazed at her with vacant eyes.

"Max," the voice had a hard inflection, "supper is waitin'." She bent over him and shook his shoulder. When she touched him, he came back to Kenyon Buildings.

"Come to supper," said the woman sharply.

"D——n supper!" he exclaimed passionately. "I'm going out to dine."

"With the Prince of Wiles, I s'pose. What did that man have to say?"

"He told me to keep my mouth shut—and I'm going to do it."

CHAPTER XVII

A TRAGIC INTERRUPTION

MRS. CORNELIUS SPARLING'S house in Cadogan Square was one of the prettiest and pleasantest in London—and one of the cleanest. "Cleanliness is next to Godliness," said Mrs. Corny, alluding to the fact that Lady Maperton occupied the adjoining mansion. A stranger, dropped by some geni into the hall, would have laid odds that he was in a country house, so freshly calendered were the chintzes, so white the ceilings, so sweet the roses and honeysuckle, so stainless the shining floors. Upstairs, however, was a room full of books and pamphlets, a man's room, with rods and guns and a big, square desk, a room unscented by flowers, but smelling somewhat strongly of tobacco. Here Mrs. Corny read and wrote, and here, upon occasions, she received her intimate friends. Above the mantelpiece hung the only picture in the room, a portrait of the late Mr. Sparling, a small man, with a pale, lean, intelligent face—the kind of face seldom seen out of New York. This gentleman, it was well known, had not inspired in his wife anything more romantic than respect and affection. He never questioned her right to do as she pleased, and when he died left her a large fortune—all he possessed—unhampered by restriction or condition. Mrs. Corny liked to sit opposite the portrait, liked to meet the kind eyes, reading in them sympathy and encouragement.

Upon the morning of the day when Festus made known to Max the names of his parents, Mrs. Corny received a note. Mrs. Arthur Wyndquest reminded

her dear Letty that she was coming to tea at five punctually. At this very ordinary billet Mrs. Corny winked and blinked, muttering to herself a scorn of interjections. Then she unlocked a business-like cabinet, and, pulling open a drawer labelled "R," extracted from a sheaf of letters a note not very dissimilar from the one she had just laid upon her table. This second note was signed "Daphne Romayne," and was dated May, 1897. The writer begged Mrs. Corny to execute a certain commission. At this letter Mrs. Corny also blinked and winked.

"It's extraordinary," she exclaimed. "Marriage has changed the girl's handwriting—and for the better. This," she looked once more at the note signed Daphne Romayne, "this indicates weakness, vacillation, vanity, selfishness; the other, strength, steadfastness, dignity, and altruism."

When Bridget came at a quarter to five Mrs. Corny began at once: "Do you remember a letter you wrote asking me to buy you a certain piece of Brussels lace?"

"No," replied Bridget, off her guard.

"In May, 1897. My dear Daphne, you *must* remember; here it is."

Bridget knew that her cheeks were scarlet.

"Of course," she stammered. "B-b-brussels lace—yes. A lovely bit."

"Which that licensed prattler of a sister of yours was wearing last night? Well, my dear, I've been comparing that note with the one I received this morning, and you will allow me to tell you that marriage has been the mending of a character needing a few stitches." Bridget recovered her self-possession, which, however, was to be put to a severer strain. While Mrs. Corny was pouring the tea and holding forth on the subject of character-delineation by handwriting, a footman entered, presenting on a salver a note from Lady Quest. Mrs. Corny glanced at it, told the waiting servant that there was no answer, and turned to Bridget.

"Your twin," said she, "takes the bun! She implores me to ask the Master of the Buckhounds for inclosure tickets for some unknown friends of hers. Listen to this: 'I know you won't mind, you kind old dear, because, if he refuses, you will not care a straw, whereas I should feel snubbed and crushed. I have a wretched headache after my party or I should come to see you. . . .'"

Bridget said nothing, while Mrs. Corny stared hard at the note.

"This is more than odd," she murmured, after a long pause. "Your twin to-day writes as you wrote two years ago? Look at the impudent tail of that 'g,' and the indecision of those down strokes."

"You are crazy about handwriting, my dear Letty. Tear up that letter, and tell me about Dr. Festus."

Mrs. Corny carefully laid the note on the top of the other two. Then she lit a cigarette.

"Festus is a fraud," she replied, "and I feel in my bones that he is plotting: a miching-malecho man if ever there was one. It is amazing that such a fake should be received here, but the English swallow anything that tickles their appetites, and they gobble humbug more greedily than plovers' eggs. Have you found out anything about Max?"

In reply to this question, Bridget mentioned the diary and what it had held.

"And you say Max has vanished?"

"Yes; we called in Cheape Street."

"And you made no further inquiries?"

"Letty, I can see that you think me heartless."

Her cheeks began to flush beneath Mrs. Corny's blinking eyes.

"You could have found out his address from the firm who fixed up your house."

"I thought of that," faltered Bridget, "but—but——"

She closed her lips resolutely.

"Hav'n't you something to tell me?" said Mrs. Corny, taking her hand and patting it. "What is it? Out with it! Or shall I guess? You and your sister

have excited a curiosity in me which was not slaked till five minutes ago."

"Slaked?"

"Why did you and Daphne trade names?"

Bridget burst into tears. Then she told her story from beginning to end, and the relief of speech brought a faint smile or two to her face.

"I'm glad you guessed," she concluded; "I really wanted to tell you, but I hadn't the nerve."

Mrs. Corny shook her head. "You're in a tight place," she said; "I predict—ructions. Chips at any rate will make things hum. It has been rough on him. Without flattering you too disgracefully one may remark that Arthur has gained what Chips has lost—a good wife. Arthur will say nothing, but he'll look as if he'd been hit with a big club."

"I feel that," said Bridget nervously.

"Say—why not go home and tell him at once—get it over!"

"He's preparing speeches for this campaign in Scotland."

"Tell him anyway! Great Scott! You're on the edge of a precipice. Suppose he finds out as I did? Tell him. That is my last word—tell him!"

She rose and almost pushed her guest from the room, repeating the words a dozen times: "Tell him!" Her magnetism seemed to affect Bridget.

"I will tell him," she said resolutely.

She went downstairs, and got into her victoria. The coachman, a careful man, drove slowly down Sloane Street, because it was unusually crowded. As a rule Bridget was alive to the humours of a thoroughfare, but to-day these failed to distract her. Several smartly dressed men raised their hats as she passed, smiling gaily, and more than one waved his hand. Bridget acknowledged these salutations with a mechanical bow, knowing that they were meant for her twin. It annoyed her to be continually mistaken for Daphne; the smiles of the smart young men bred frowns, because each pricked a conscience already too sore. As she passed

the statue of Achilles her face was illumined by a resolution to seek out Max and Pretty, and to make amends, if it were possible, for a neglect both cowardly and criminal. Upon the following Whit-Monday she had promised to take a trainful of factory girls into the country. Lady Maperton had given her the day's use of a lovely place on the Thames, but Bridget, recalling the experience of the previous year, had dreaded her task, for the girls, from sheer animal spirits and love of a lark, invariably got out of hand. The journey to and from London was sure to prove a rowdy and distressing pilgrimage; the chaff with the half-drunken loafers on the platforms, the heat, the confusion of a bank-holiday, the perspiring jostling crowds at Waterloo, the interminable chatter and singing lasting without intermission for nearly twelve hours, were indeed enough to appal any gently nurtured woman. Now she took comfort in the thought of the pleasure she was about to give to a couple of hundred hard-working girls, whose bodies were worn and warped by toil. Her factory girls, her refuge for the friendless and forlorn, her untiring efforts to ameliorate the lot of less fortunate sisters—these surely would be counted sufficient to blot out that one little *lie* which had come from the heart and brain of another.

Then she laughed, mirthlessly, as the mirage faded.

When she got home, the butler said, in answer to a question, that Wyndquest was writing in the small library behind the dining-room, a room whose windows looked out upon the gardens of Belgrave House. Arthur laid down his pen when Bridget crossed the threshold.

"Where are we dining to-night?" he asked.

"At the Carlton Hotel," said Bridget, standing behind his chair. "You are tired?"

"Yes," he answered quickly; "I am tired. I've been carrying all day the burden of what you said—and left unsaid—last night. I feel like Issachar. And the burden of what was unsaid is the most galling. I have been pinched by prosperity."

"My poor Arthur!"

She laid a tender emphasis upon the possessive pronoun. Wyndquest caught her hand and kissed it. His caresses had the distinction of rarity.

"Am I still yours?" he demanded. "I sign myself yours' to so many that I may well ask to whom I belong." Then he allowed his eyes to dwell upon her dress, a cambric of milk-white colour, with tiny sprays of roses and true lovers' knots embroidered upon it. Standing before him, framed by the window, with the background of lawns and stately trees, she might have been one of Gainsborough's great ladies. The delicacy and finish of the picture enchanted him.

"What a lovely woman you are!"

"Thank you."

"I am held to be an authority on figures. If I showed you to the House, not even the Irish members would question my judgment."

Bridget's cheeks were tinged with a faint pink glow.

"But it is not your beauty," he added, "which enthrals me. You will keep my love, dear, because you have made me realise your—strength. A man can measure love when he looks up, never when he looks down."

Her face clouded.

"Don't put me on a pedestal," she murmured uneasily.

"Oh, I don't think you perfect," he retorted, smiling; "I should loathe the perfect woman, because she would reflect too faithfully one's own imperfections. The perfect woman, for instance, would not have urged me to enter public life, as you did, and then, a couple of years later, rebuke me because, against my own inclinations, I had obeyed her. *La donna e mobile*—that is not the least of her charms."

"I am not the woman you think me."

The words fell reluctantly from her lips.

"You are not," he replied, still smiling. "You have changed for the better, and I have changed for the worse, but," he added vehemently, "thank God that

it is so! Had you become worldly and selfish, less true, less pure than you are, the effect on me would have been, I am sure, disastrous. It is curious, and, indeed, might serve as an argument in favour of the moral superiority of woman that, generally speaking, the evil that is in the husband touches the good wife to finer issues, whereas a bad wife would corrupt a saint. I feel that the greatest calamity which could overtake me would be the loss of the faith which you have inspired—that faith in the created being by which one may dimly apprehend the Creator."

Then his lips closed suddenly, as if the speaker had slammed a door on speech. The reticence and reserve of the man were as sentinels guarding a great wealth of feeling. Bridget turned aside, looking out of the window. Her weakness and irresolution became intolerable. As the outlines of the trees grew blurred, seen through a mist of tears, so her mental and moral landscape was obscured by a shower of doubts and misgivings. She told herself that she was grovelling before opportunity.

In a minute opportunity passed, leaving her in the dust. A peal of the old-fashioned bell, followed by a thunderous knock, proclaimed the advent of a dame of quality.

"We are not at home," said Wyndquest impatiently.

Bridget ran into the hall to intercept the butler, and instruct him, but when that dignitary opened the front door Lavinia Bidgood rushed past him, and into Bridget's arms. She was sobbing hysterically, and for a short time quite inarticulate. Then she told a piteous tale. Her children were allowed to walk abroad without maid or governess, a practice sanctioned and commended by the Froebelian Society, of which the Honourable Mrs. Bidgood was pillar and pulpit. That afternoon the mother had allowed them to visit a friend in South Kensington. Crossing Piccadilly, just in front of Apsley House, a furiously driven hansom had knocked down Enid. She had picked herself up, seemingly little the worse for the accident, but a policeman carried her

across the road to St. George's Hospital. As she lay in his arms, the blood began to trickle from her ears and nostrils. After examination, the receiving surgeon ordered her to be taken into one of the wards, and the mother was summoned.

"And now," she wailed, in conclusion, "they don't know whether she will live or die. And the child is calling for you—for *you*, and not for me," she added bitterly.

Bridget held her friend's hand as Lavinia's horses sped down Park Lane. The horror of the accident, her love for the child, her sympathy for the mother, challenged and commanded attention; and yet behind these stood the spectre of a lost opportunity, and nothing, not even the sorrow and suffering of her friend, could exorcise that grim spirit. When she reflected that in the agony of her weakness she had almost acclaimed the tragic interruption, that the first passion-twisted phrases had fallen like music in her ear, because they excused her silence, she shivered.

CHAPTER XVIII

"DANS UNE BARQUE OÙ NUL NE RAME"

DURING the week that followed, Bridget was fully occupied in Portland Place, ministering to the distracted mother (who was not allowed to see her child) and Henry Bidgood, the most helpless of the two. Enid lay at the point of death in one of the general wards of the hospital (this also was a source of woe to Lavinia); but the surgeons were of opinion that her case could be treated to a successful issue. Had Bridget possessed less feeling, the comedy which is so interwoven with tragedy might have provoked a smile; for the Priestess of the New Gnosticism, who till now had espoused and preached the doctrines of Christian Science, became of a sudden a devout believer in scalpel and bistoury. Indeed, an indiscreet friend, who urged the mother to bespeak the services of a distinguished female Healer (at only ten guineas a week), was scourged out of Portland Place beneath the lash of a tongue leaded with despair. "When I think," said Lavinia, "that I was reading a paper at the club, a paper on the Care and Culture of Children, at the very moment when my darling was lying under those cruel hoofs, I feel as if I should go mad. This is a judgment on me."

Afterwards Bridget realised that the accident had had an important bearing upon her own life and thought. The Angel of Death is the arch adjuster; beneath his sable wing petty interests and ambitions fade and vanish; the great things remain beacons. Bridget would have confessed to her husband upon the

morning succeeding the accident, but Lord Maperton had gone north to address a political meeting in Edinburgh, and Arthur Wyndquest went with him. Lady Maperton came to Portland Place, wearing suggestive black, and speaking in funereal whispers. Lavinia burst out laughing when she saw her sister. "Did you come in a hearse?" she asked hysterically. "Duty brought me on foot," replied Lady Maperton austerely, conscious that a mile's walk beneath a June sun must be counted to her for righteousness; "my things will arrive presently in a four-wheeler." She insisted upon staying for three days. "She is really a good sort," said Lavinia to Bridget, when Lady Maperton returned to Cadogan Square, "and who am I that I should laugh at her elastic-side boots and evangelical bonnets?" Bridget did not go back to Park Street, because Wyndquest was detained in Scotland, but treading in the steps of the apostle, she journeyed to Tottenham Court Road, and there learned to her surprise that Paul Festus had come on a similar errand. Vaguely scenting mischief, she drove to the Kenyon Buildings.

Pretty received her coldly. Since the apostle's visit to 143, Max had behaved queerly, finding fault with everything and everybody, especially the baby, who was cutting three back teeth and continuously fretful. Max had occasional fits of depression, when his mind chewed the bitter cud of what might have been. Pretty was impotent against these blue devils, which tore her more cruelly than Max. And associated with them was the never-to-be-forgotten morning at Bracknell; the gracious figures of the twins, the blooming, fragrant garden, the Paradise from which she had fluttered away—broken-hearted. Time, and the baby, and Max had mended her heart. She had learned to love the father of her child, who—to do him justice—was kind and generous, but she had learned also to fear the gulf which yawns between ignorance and knowledge. Her face hardened when she saw Bridget, because she recognised in her one of the sirens whom fancy pictured as standing upon the

far shore of yesterday, beckoning to Max, stretching forth white alluring arms.

"Max and I have kept ourselves to ourselves," she observed, in answer to Bridget's first questions.

"That is your baby?"

"It's mine and Max's."

As she spoke she eyed the visitor. Had Bridget winced at sight of the frail, sickly creature which she held in her arms; had she turned by a perceptible movement from the pale, waxen morsel, so unlovely and unlovable, a pauper indeed in all that constitutes a baby's wealth, save the one greatest thing—Pretty's love; had she allowed too much pity, even, to flood her eyes, the mother would have rudely ordered her from the room. But Bridget, with that detachment of which mention has been made, was silently contrasting this infant with the daughter of Daphne, the little Betty whom she had seen only that morning, befrilled and beribboned, in the arms of a white-dressed amazon, the darling of all beholders, about to take the air in her mother's victoria. It might be said of Daphne, what Daudet said of Sidonie, in *Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné*, "*dans l'enfant elle ne voyait que la promenade.*" She told all her friends that she was never so happy as when she was driving in the park with her child, and the world pronounced her an adoring mother. But when Betty was seized with a slight attack of croup, it was Bridget who sat beside her cot throughout a long February night; Daphne slept in her own bed—exhausted, so she testified, by the rigours of anxiety.

Bridget gazed into the baby's face, thinking of the doctrine of compensation. Betty lay in a rose-coloured cradle festooned with costly laces; the nameless Nancy lay in her mother's arms.

"I wish I had a baby," said Bridget sorrowfully.

"And what a lovely baby 'twould be," exclaimed the other. "Would yer like to hold her?" she added quickly; "she's as clean as any queen's child, but her face does look dirty-like—sometimes."

Bridget took the child, and Pretty fetched a chair. She was now feverishly anxious to please her visitor. Within ten minutes Bridget was in possession of the baby's biography, a sad little chapter of accidents ; a cup of tea evoked other confidences : Max's fits of depression, and so forth. Not a word leaked from her lips against the man whose protection she had accepted. Finally she mentioned Festus.

"He's been here three times. Max don't know anything about him, but he knows all about Max, or says he does, but if ever 'liar' lay plain as print on a man's face, it lies on his, d——n 'im!"

Bridget laughed, and Pretty laughed too, after apologising profusely for a word which, as she explained, was now but seldom in her mouth.

"You are very sharp," said Bridget.

Pretty nodded her head confidentially. "Yes, I s'pose I am—about some things," she added. "I can tell silver from pewter without biting it, but—lor!—I'm as stupid as an owl at book-learning. And blame me, if I can talk as Max talks. That riles him, pore feller."

"How is your mother?" asked Bridget. She did not like to speak further of the apostle, although curiosity was insistent.

"Mother? Oh, she ain't changed. Thirsty all the time, because we don't give 'er money, and she won't work."

The girl—she was only nineteen—talked on, and Bridget listened, looking into the speaker's face, noting the mobility of expression, the attractive play of lip and eye. She could see also impending shadows—the drunken mother, the sickly child, the irritable father trying to make porcelain out of clay. Being a Californian, coming from a country where convention and tradition are, perhaps, unduly flouted, Bridget was able to recognise in Pretty qualities which might have remained invisible to the eyes of an English lady. At Menlo, it is true, where her childhood had been passed, the unwritten laws which govern a few aristocratic southern families were as those of the Medes and Persians,

but against these the twins had always rebelled; albeit the children of a New England man and a Creole, they were essentially of the West. Presently Bridget assigned a reason for her visit.

"Mr. Wyndquest once spoke to you of living in the country. Country air would do your baby good."

Pretty's face instantly hardened.

"No, no," she exclaimed vehemently. "I could not leave Max."

Bridget said no more. She waited for Max, growing more nervous as the minutes passed. It was strange, she reflected, how circumstances had combined in a sort of conspiracy of silence.

"Max is late," said Pretty.

"I must see him," said Bridget. "If you have anything to do, Pretty, don't mind me; I'll take care of Nancy."

"Cold supper," replied Pretty laconically. "Mother's gone to see an old friend in Cheape Street. She'll come home drunk. Her friends always give her booze."

Bridget then spoke of Max's childhood. Pretty listened eagerly, yet with a line between her brows. At half-past six a letter was handed to Pretty by a commissioner in a black and gold uniform. "You are Mrs. Orpin?" said the man. "That's what they call me," replied Pretty. "Then I'm to give this to you." Pretty clutched at the envelope with fear gathering in her hazel eyes. When the man had walked heavily away, she sat down with the letter in her hand, and gazed piteously at Bridget.

"It's from Max," she faltered.

"My dear Pretty," it ran,—"For some months past I have seen plainly that a parting was inevitable. We came to the cross-roads when you insisted upon Mrs. Parslow's living with us. I feel that I have given you a square deal. I have shared with you fairly. I have tried—not very successfully—to educate you. Now, I send you what money I can spare, and, if luck turns, I shall settle on you and the child a sum sufficient to keep you both comfortably. For a time

it seemed well that we should share our troubles and disappointments; that time has passed. It is as plain to me as if it were written in letters of fire upon the sky that to go on living together would mean for both of us misery. You would end by hating me; I should hate you; perhaps—you know I am honest—perhaps I should ill-treat you. It is better to part now—friends, grateful to each other for the past.

"I have just re-read what I have written. It seems cold-blooded, but I am acting according to my lights.

"MAX.

"P.S.—You may fancy another woman has beguiled me. It is not so."

Pretty read the letter; then she closed her eyes, and a Bank of England note fluttered to the ground, where it lay white and crisp upon the cheap carpet. Bridget knew that the sword had fallen.

"You can go," said Pretty, opening her eyes. "Max is not coming home."

"He has sent you that instead," said Bridget, pointing to the piece of paper upon the carpet.

Pretty nodded defiantly: "I ain't complaining, am I?" she demanded in a hard, hoarse whisper. "Max owes me nothing—not even money. See!" She sprang to her feet, snatched up the banknote, and tore it into a dozen pieces. Bridget stood up also with the baby in her arms. She dared not speak, for speech, she felt, would be as vitriol, but the tears gathered in her eyes and began to trickle down her cheeks. When Pretty saw those wet eyes she turned, sobbing, and flung herself face downward upon the small sofa by the window.

Later she gave Bridget the letter to read.

"It's all over," said Pretty.

Bridget came to the same conclusion before she had read the postscript. "I knew it was coming," Pretty said. "When Max and me was poor we stuck together, but ever since he begun to earn big wages I've bin scared to death. It's the good times, not the bad, that's

played 'ell with 'im and me. All the same he did give me a square deal. Yes—he did!"

Bridget had not the heart to contradict her. The woman in her was in arms against the man, but she merely sighed a protest, respecting a loyalty which she could hardly understand. Presently Pretty looked again at the letter.

"There ain't no address," she remarked; then she added in a harder tone: "He might know that I wouldn't demean myself by hunting him, but if I had that doctor here, I'd—I'd stamp on his face, you bet yer life! If it hadn't been for him, I'd ha' kept Max a little longer. The account's straight between Max and me, but I'm going to settle with Festus—and don't you forget it!"

The use of the American slang proved—if proof were necessary—that she had tried to master Max's vocabulary, and yet, despite her efforts, had retained only the slang.

Suddenly the sounds of a familiar voice floated up the stairs and into the room. Mrs. Parslow, returning from her visit to Cheape Street, had been moved to sing by her familiar spirit—gin:

> A few more years shall roll,
> A few more seasons come,
> And we shall be with those that rest
> Asleep within the tomb.

Bridget, glancing at Pretty, who was undressing the baby, saw her face change and set. It was obvious that Mrs. Parslow was about to be held responsible for the shortcomings of Max.

"You'd better go," said Pretty. "Mother ain't receiving the nobility and gentry—to-night."

"I shall stay," replied Bridget. Then, moved by an irresistible impulse, she took the girl into her arms. "Pretty," she entreated, "I am sure you will not be unkind to your mother. Go into the kitchen and let me speak to her. I will explain."

Pretty shook her head. "I—I *must* let off steam."

"I suppose so," Bridget helplessly assented.

So steam obscured the atmosphere for some ten minutes. When it cleared away, its hygienic and cleansing properties were not to be denied: Mrs. Parslow had become sober, and Pretty was quietly crying.

"Woman, not man, is born to trouble," said the mother, sniffing loudly, "and the sparks," she continued acidly, "if by sparks is meant the men, will fly downward, not upward. I don't expec' ter see men in the noo Jeroosalem. That's why we're told there's to be no marryin', nor givin' in marriage. I forgive yer 'ard words, Ellun, becos I know 'ow yer feel. Mrs. Botting, 'er as used ter be our neighbour in Cheape Street, is now a-singin' in the 'evinly choir. She fell down dead yesterday, the pore thing, becos Botting cut 'is throat; did it with a penknife, too, the great silly, and, bless yer, they've sewed 'im up an' 'e's feelin' quite 'isself, but she, pore dear, is dead. Oh, it's we women as suffers 'ere below, but I'd be no true Christian if I doubted that the men's turn 'll come."

Bridget took her leave, promising to return on the morrow. On her way to Portland Place she reflected that this ill wind which had driven Max from Kenyon Buildings had brought good to her. Once more he had drifted out of her life. She hated herself, because what was weakest in her nature clung to this sordid fact. If Wyndquest should leave her, if—the more probable hypothesis—he should cast her out of his heart, when the truth became known, would she not fall dead to all practical purpose? "I have no baby to comfort me," she thought, her mind reverting to Pretty standing with Nancy in her arms. "We do suffer," she murmured passionately; "we suffer more than the men."

On the morrow she drove to Wyndquest House, where she found Chips in the nursery playing with his daughter. "If you want Mousie," he said, with a hard laugh, "you had better look for her in any house except this." Bridget said that she had come to see him, and they went down together to the small room behind the

dining-room, which had been used by Lord Quest as a sanctuary; this had not been touched by the decorators. Bridget told Pretty's story very briefly. Chips at once replied that if Mrs. Parslow's thirst could be slaked by a sight of the Itchen, he would gladly give her—rent free, if necessary—a cottage hard by the silvery stream.

"What a trump you are," he exclaimed at length. "By Heaven! I wish that——"

He hesitated, and lit a cigarette, eyeing his visitor uneasily. Bridget felt herself blushing beneath his insistent gaze.

"I fell in love with you first," he murmured apologetically, "and sometimes I——"

"Don't," said Bridget.

"You are not happy either," he said abruptly. "All right, I'll say no more."

Bridget remained for luncheon in the hope of meeting her twin; and at a quarter to two Daphne arrived, flushed with heat and excitement, but looking—so her sister thought—very much the worse for the season's wear and tear. Others dropped in—a singer, a famous financier, and two racing women. During the meal, which was unduly long, the talk turned upon money. The racing women proclaimed their gains, not mentioning their losses (which, according to Chips, were paid by others); the financier spoke solemnly of an immense *coup*; even the singer bragged of his enormous fees. Everybody shouted, and none listened to his neighbour. The financier, who was a German Jew, ate and drank voraciously, praising too unctuously the food and wines, but the singer, mindful of an afternoon's engagement, wore a muzzle. It struck Bridget (not for the first time) that these smart folks attempted and accomplished Herculean tasks. The mere recital of their arduous labours made her back ache. The racing women had just returned from Newmarket, where they had stood on the heath for three days beneath a broiling sun. They had risen each morning at six to see the horses gallop upon

the Lime Kilns, they had played poker till long past midnight, and—they looked as fresh as paint could make them!

As soon as the coffee and liqueurs were despatched the guests hurried away, and Bridget found herself alone with her twin and Chips. She spoke of Pretty and the cottage on the banks of the Itchen. Much to her surprise, Daphne shrilly rebuked her lord. He had no right to turn his cottage into Magdalen asylums without consulting her, and so on, and so forth. At the end of this tirade Chips rose. "I shall do what I please at Quest," he said. "Let me remind you that you invite to this house, against my wishes, Mrs. Hope and Lady St. Cross, not to mention the ladies who have just left." When he had gone Daphne turned upon her twin. "I don't care a red cent about Pretty; I am thinking of Max. Do we want *him* at Quest?"

Bridget was silent.

"Max did not recognise you," continued Daphne excitedly, "but if he sees us together the game is up." She paused and then burst into hysterical tears. Bridget tried to comfort her—in vain. A quarter of an hour later, as she was crossing the hall on her way to the carriage, she encountered Seckford, followed by a visitor. It was the apostle of sinlessness, and he advanced to greet Bridget with outstretched hand and smiling face.

"My dear Lady Quest," he began, "you have not forgotten our little appointment, surely?"

"I am Mrs. Wyndquest," replied Bridget stiffly. "My sister is in the drawing-room."

"I beg pardon."

Bridget passed on with a cool bow, wondering what business or pleasure had brought Paul Festus to Grosvenor Square.

CHAPTER XIX

DE L'AUDACE, TOUJOURS DE L'AUDACE

ALREADY the reader will have guessed that Daphne, with her inherited weakness and moral cowardice, had fallen into the unscrupulous hands of Festus. As he expected, within three days after he had broached the affair, Daphne sent for him and demanded proofs. To her inexperience these were so overwhelming that in imagination she saw herself stripped of her large income, and the laughing-stock of Mayfair. At this psychological moment she was eager and willing to pay blackmail; but the apostle, moved by the sight of beauty in distress, essayed the part of consoler and friend.

"You take this too hard," he said suavely.

"That low man," gasped Daphne. "Don't let him come near me!"

"No, no," murmured Festus. "Be calm, dear lady. I think I can help you."

Daphne dried her eyes, and then looked hard at the apostle of sinlessness.

"You mean——" she began hesitatingly.

"Yes; compromise. This wastrel is not—er—fit to be entrusted with the Romayne fortune even if the law awarded it to him."

"Of course not. Why, he has been living with——"

"Quite so; it is because of his unfitness that I come to you."

"To me?" Daphne raised her delicate brows.

"Your sister is quixotic, my dear Lady Quest, and her husband has peculiar views."

"I see your point," said Daphne slowly; she was

beginning to understand the apostle. "You were quite right to come to me—first." Then her voice and eyes hardened. "How much do you want?" she asked.

Festus laughed. He was not quite prepared to answer this audacious question.

"I want your friendship for one thing."

"Friendship?"

"Do not sneer! Believe me, we have more in common than you think."

She was idly reflecting that he had a melodious voice, when he spoke again: "It is true that I want money also, and this young man must receive his share."

"He knows?"

"He knows—what I have permitted him to know. I can settle with him."

"Why did you tell him?"

The question betrayed her. Festus had no doubt whatever that this dame of quality was worthy to be his accomplice.

"That is my little secret," he replied lightly. "Will you accept my friendship?"

"I would sooner have you for a friend than an enemy," she said, holding out her hand.

In Max, however, he found less plastic material. It was part of the apostle's plan to slowly discolour, with the pigments of contrast, Max's moral sense, if he possessed such a thing. Festus, as Pretty Parslow surmised, persuaded Max to leave Kenyon Buildings and what they held. The apostle had belief in the virtue of appearances; and beneath his fostering care Max began to look like the son of a gentleman. "But I feel like the son of a gun," said Max gloomily, when his mentor congratulated him. He told himself that he had played the cad and the coward. It is true that such thoughts oppressed him only in the early morning. After luncheon, for instance, he felt justified in leaving an ignorant woman who had no legal claim upon him; after dinner he asserted roundly that no other course was possible. One day from the apostle's

windows he saw Pretty walking slowly up and down the street. He remembered the long hours when he had lain at the point of death in Holborn ; he recalled the patience and kindliness of his nurse, her unfailing good spirits and sense of humour, her loyalty and generosity. Thinking of these things, he was about to rush from the room and into the street below ; but Festus interfered. "Go," he murmured softly ; "go back to the gutter—if you really want to."

"D——n you!" growled Max ; but he did not go.

During this season of suspense he often speculated more or less vaguely upon the motives which had constrained Festus to befriend him. Why had not the apostle used his information to extort a large sum of money from the twins? Max was shrewd enough to perceive that Festus was in pursuit of the dollar. He guessed that the apostle was a master of those arts which our neighbours across the Channel speak of collectively as *chantage*.

"What do *you* expect to get out of this?" he asked Festus one day.

Festus raised his brows.

"I do not know," he replied candidly. "Not so much as—er—I hoped. We hold strong cards, and we will play them for all they are worth."

"You move slowly."

"But I get there all the same," quoted the apostle. "Has it ever struck you, my young friend, that I might have played a lone hand?"

"Yes," said Max bluntly ; "that *has* worried me. Why didn't you?"

"I'll answer that question and others—later."

This air of mystery always exasperated the painter.

"Is there a flaw in the case?"

"That is not for me to say."

"How much longer am I going to wait?"

"You can go back to Kenyon Buildings—if you like."

The truth was this: Festus had beguiled Daphne ; now, in turn, he was being beguiled by her. He had

his weakness, and Daphne probed it to the core. If he could inspire in her a proper sense of gratitude, he told himself he would be willing to commute Max's claims, perhaps, under certain circumstances, to cancel them altogether.

Daphne, on the other hand, had begun to enjoy the comedy. She loved excitement, and she had grown to like Festus because he furnished her with excitement in allopathic doses. The man had a fascination: he was clever, original, and in love. From time immemorial the weakness of strong men has appealed irresistibly to lovely women. And the thought of giving up her money terrified her. She was living in a merry-go-round with people who made a fetish of gold. Here were countesses, beauties, women of wit and wealth; but how many combined in one personality all her attributes? Tasting the fruit of prosperity, she became insatiate.

"You do too much," said Festus. "You are trying to put into the years that are the pleasures of the years that were. I know that feeling, but it doesn't pay."

"You are not a bad sort," said Daphne, in her English slang.

"I've had a very tough time. Ever since I was a boy I have been obliged to live by my wits. I could tell you some queer stories."

"Please tell them," said Daphne sweetly.

Festus noted that she was unwilling to meet Max, and for reasons of his own kept the pair apart; but one day, at the end of the season, Max saw her in Tate Gallery, and, himself unseen, watched her with interest. She was his half-sister, and the tie of blood is strong. His pride prevented him from speaking to her. That evening he said to Festus:

"I am quite willing to share and share alike with my sisters."

"Are you?" said Festus with his soft laugh. "I wish they had the same kindly feelings towards you."

"Perhaps they have," said Max slowly. "I believe,"

he added with hesitation, "that if we were to meet, the three of us—alone, the affair could be settled in ten minutes."

Festus had foreseen such an arrangement, which left him out in the cold. He smiled blandly as he said:

"You agreed to leave the settlement in my hands; and I hold the proofs, remember."

"True," said Max. Then he mentioned when and where he had met Daphne.

"You acted wisely in not speaking to her."

"You know her?" said Max.

"Yes," replied the apostle, with his subtle smile. "I know Lady Quest, and she won't disgorge a cent, my friend, unless the law makes her."

Meantime the apostle had received more than one large cheque from Daphne: money wherewith to gamble in Capel Court. He won largely at first, and began to contemplate the breaking of his relations with Matilda Bosman, in whose faded blue eyes lurked sad reproach. Then fortune frowned, and for a season Miss Bosman was seen to smile. She occupied a small house in Lower Belgrave Street—which she spoke of as a *maisonette*—where she entertained her many friends culled carefully from a place she called *la haute Bohème*. Here might be found on a Sunday afternoon the shining lights of the Renaissance Club—artists, politicians, and musicians; gentlemen, for the most part, ofleisure rather than means, some of whom, it is to be feared, abused the hospitality of Miss Bosman by saying unkind things of her behind her back. The poor lady was neither witty nor wise, but—as Festus once observed—she could appreciate the wit and wisdom of others, and had, moreover, a ministering angel's understanding of those physical needs from which the wisest and noblest of men are not exempt. Miss Bosman could not make a joke to save her life, but she could, and did, make a shrimp salad which had been commended by a Prime Minister. Now Festus, like many a clever rogue before him, made the mistake of underrating Miss Bosman's intelligence. Stupid people never forget

important things which concern themselves. What clerk, for instance, no matter how brainless he may be, fails to draw his salary on the first of the month? Miss Bosman, as the apostle's faithful and obedient servant, expected her wage, and not receiving it, began to wonder if by chance it were squandered elsewhere. Such speculation on the part of middle-aged spinsters generally ends in certainty. Miss Bosman employed an agent, a private detective, who shadowed the apostle for a fortnight, and then submitted his report. Dr. Festus, it seemed, had received in his rooms near Jermyn Street, *three times*, a veiled lady whose veil had not entirely concealed her youth and loveliness. Indeed, in speaking of the fair's charms, the detective indulged himself with so many superlatives that the spinster reconsidered her determination to double his fee. Men were all alike, she reflected; not even a spy was proof against golden hair and a milk and roses complexion.

"There is no one else," said the detective, in conclusion—wishing, good man, to cheer his client.

"Did you expect to find any more?" said the lady snappishly. The detective replied that such expectations were not always disappointed.

"The rest of his time," continued the spy, "has been given to a young man of the name of Orpin. He and the doctor are as thick as——"

"Thieves," snapped Miss Bosman. "What is the lady's name?"

"Mrs. Arthur Wyndquest, the sister of Viscountess Quest."

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Bosman.

The detective then explained that he had followed the lady to a house in Park Street, and had learned from a baker in Mount Street her name and other particulars.

When he had taken his leave and his fee, poor Miss Bosman shed many tears. Hope, however, whispered softly that the veiled lady might have sought the apostle for advice and counsel. She had met Bridget,

had subscribed handsomely to her Home, and she greatly admired Arthur Wyndquest, both as man and philanthropist. Accordingly, upon the following Sunday, when she found herself alone with the apostle, she asked him point-blank if he had seen anything of Mrs. Wyndquest.

"No, dearest," said Festus, quite honestly, "I have not. I have no liking for the lady. She chooses to misunderstand me and my work."

He kissed the spinster's thin cheek and went his way. But Miss Bosman shed no more tears. The necessity for action dried her eyes, and lent them a passing sparkle. She told her maidservants that she was about to spend a few days in the country. Then, taking with her a modest bag, she drove eastward, and engaged a room opposite the apartments of Festus, whence, behind some lace curtains, with excellent glasses at her eyes, she could see what was passing across the street without being seen. For two days she watched in vain. Upon the morning of the third day she made a discovery. Another woman was watching the same house. This so excited her that she determined to speak to the woman, who seemed to be pretty, although obviously a —person. She had the wit to wait till the person was walking away, and did not overtake her till she reached St. James's Park. Here the person sat down upon an empty bench, and Miss Bosman took a seat beside her.

"I wish to speak to you," she said softly.

Pretty—for it was she—stared at the speaker; then she smiled, for she thought that she recognised in Miss Bosman an evangelist.

"I'm not one as wants to be saved," she said quickly.

Miss Bosman ignored this observation.

"You have been watching a man," murmured the spinster.

"Most of 'em need watching," said Pretty. "Well, what business is that of yours?"

"Only this, that I am watching him too."

"What? Napoleon?"

"Dr. Festus," murmured Miss Bosman coldly. She

could appreciate the description of the apostle. "What has he done to you?"

"What has he done?" echoed Pretty fiercely. "He's robbed me of—of everything; nearly everything," she added quickly, "he left me my baby."

Miss Bosman gasped and blushed.

"You are married?"

"No—I ain't, thank the Lord!"

"And he—he deserted you?"

"He? Napoleon?" Pretty burst out laughing. "Lor' no. D'yer think I'd have any dealin's with the likes of him? Not if he really was an emperor! But he took from me my man; yes, he did; and because o' that, I'd like to stamp on his face."

Miss Bosman rose; she had learned all she wished to know. "I hope your man will come back to you," she observed quietly, not without feeling.

"He won't," said Pretty. "When you lose yer grip on 'em they go, and they don't come back. Is Napoleon anything to yer? I hope not; for he's a wrong 'un, and I know 'em when I see 'em!"

Miss Bosman thoughtfully returned to her lodging. She had made up her mind to bell the cat, as she liked to call the lady who came to see the apostle of sinlessness, and she was sorry that she could not use Pretty as gloves, so to speak. However, none who had the privilege of the spinster's acquaintance accused her of being a coward.

Next day the veiled lady arrived at about three in the afternoon in a hansom, and stayed nearly an hour in the apostle's rooms. When she left, Miss Bosman followed her. The lady entered a shop in Piccadilly; Miss Bosman approached; the lady raised her veil; Miss Bosman bowed.

"You have forgotten me," she said, as Daphne stared into her thin, flushed face. "I am Miss Bosman, the lady to whom Dr. Festus is engaged to be married. I wish to speak to you—in private." Then she added, with a spice of malice: "I once subscribed to your Home"

Daphne at once apprehended the situation. To her credit (or discredit) she never turned colour. "Just so," she said slowly. "Yes, I do remember you"—her eyes rested upon the spinster—"perfectly. You must pardon me; I have such a shocking memory for—er—some faces. Yes; Dr. Festus and I are great friends. I have, in fact, just been to see him."

"Not for the first time, Mrs. Wyndquest."

Daphne was silent. It was no light thing, she knew, to allow this woman to confound her with Bridget; and yet Bridget's connection with philanthropic work presented so capital an excuse.

"No," she answered coldly, "not for the first time. I see that you have made an absurd mistake. My position, Dr. Festus' position, places us above petty conventions. In my daily work I go where I please, when I please—unquestioned."

Daphne bowed and walked from the shop, leaving the spinster in a pose of abject deprecation and apology. Consummate impudence, and a manner acquired by contact with highly born dowagers, exorcised, for the moment, the devils of jealousy and suspicion. Miss Bosman was about to leave the shop when a clerk approached her, holding a small square of cambric in his hand.

"Her ladyship dropped this," he said deferentially. "Will you return it to her, Madam, or shall we?"

"Her ladyship?" stammered Miss Bosman. "I was speaking just now to Mrs. Wyndquest."

The clerk smiled the smile of superior knowledge.

"Mrs. Arthur Wyndquest is also a customer of ours, Madam, but now we have no difficulty in telling the ladies apart. You were speaking a moment or two ago to Lady Quest. If further proof were needed we have it here." As he spoke he indicated a coronet embroidered in the corner of the handkerchief. Miss Bosman seized the handkerchief, and hurried from the shop. Her feelings were too complex to be described, but dominating jealousy, mortification, amazement, and anger was the desire for revenge upon the smiling, sweet-voiced creature who had beguiled her.

CHAPTER XX

QUEST TELLS AN AMAZING STORY

ARTHUR WYNDQUEST returned from the north a prey to certain feelings which he could ill conceal from his travelling companion, Lord Maperton. For some time, indeed, that nobleman had watched his young friend—as he called Arthur—out of the tail of an eye which was as keen as any in the kingdom. Arthur had been of service to him in Scotland; Arthur's incisive speeches had been excellently received; Arthur's tact and common sense had saved more than one awkward situation. Times were troublous, Lord Maperton said. The small cloud in South Africa was overspreading the political horizon. As a member of the Government, his lordship was of opinion that the party must close ranks and fix bayonets. "I shall drop my own schemes for the present," he said to Wyndquest, "and you must drop yours."

"I shall drop some with pleasure," said Arthur.

"You are growing lukewarm."

"Perhaps."

"I do not understand the young men of to-day," said the other impatiently, staring at Arthur, whose face remained inscrutable; "you ask for more than we did, and when you get it you throw it away. At your age I should have been ablaze with my own success; you are cold—cold!"

"I have tried to warm myself at your fires."

"Ah! a man must be his own furnace."

Arthur looked out of the window. The train was rushing through the Midlands at more than sixty miles

an hour. Arthur remembered that when he was a boy, travelling down to Quest from Harrow, he used to amuse himself by picking out the easy places in the fences. But travelling at sixty-five miles an hour, who has time to see the easy places?

"It's the pace that kills," he murmured. "We are stark, staring mad. One would think that some animal inside us gnawed our vitals whenever we sat still. I had my literary work, my work in the East End, and my wife; surely that was enough."

"Your country——"

Wyndquest shrugged his shoulders. "The country is best served," he said slowly, "by those men and women who make their own homes happy." He quoted Burns' lines.

"Ideal happiness," mumbled Lord Maperton.

"You are a square peg in a square hole," Arthur hastened to add. "You are a party man. The impending crisis warms you to the marrow; it leaves me, as you say, cold. This business means war."

"No, no."

"War; a serious war, for which we are unprepared, for which we ought to have been prepared, a war with the sympathies of every foreign nation arrayed against us. Our supremacy in South Africa must be maintained, but I cannot acclaim, as you do, the prospect of closing ranks and fixing bayonets. That's all."

Lord Maperton made no reply, for he did not believe that war was impending; but he was sensible that Wyndquest was likely to leave the field of practical politics at a time when he could be ill spared.

"If you are not satisfied," he said presently, "if there is anything you particularly want——"

"Nothing, nothing—except leisure to think."

"You have too much temperament," said Lord Maperton; and he took up his paper.

At St. Pancras, Arthur hoped to find his wife on the platform; in her stead stood Chips. Lord Maperton and his servant rushed off in a hansom; Chips turned to his cousin.

"There has been a row," he said irritably; "and I want to talk it over with you before you go home. My brougham is waiting."

"Well?" said Arthur apprehensively, as soon as they found themselves alone.

"Yesterday," began Chips, "I received a letter from a Miss Bosman, who asked me to call upon her on a matter, as she put it, of urgent private importance. I had never met the lady, but I knew of her, so I went. She told me a most extraordinary story. She is, or has been, engaged to that big Napoleonic fellow—Festus."

"A scoundrel!"

"Just so. But she fancied him. Of course, he was after her money. The woman is not quite the fool she looks, so she paid a detective to watch the apostle. The detective reported that Festus was receiving in his rooms a veiled lady whom he shadowed to your house, and pronounced to be your wife."

"What an absurd lie!" said Arthur.

"Miss Bosman then played the detective herself. She followed the veiled woman into a shop and spoke to her, recognising her, so she says, as Mrs. Arthur Wyndquest. She addressed her as Mrs. Wyndquest, charged her with going to the man's rooms, and was told that the visits were paid in connection with some charity. To cut the story short, the veiled lady, it seems, was Mousie. She has confessed as much to me. Festus has been trying to blackmail her."

"Blackmail?"

"He has shown her attested documents which prove that the twins are not entitled to their father's pile, that the second marriage was invalid; that there is a son living by a former wife, a man you know, Max something-or-other."

"Max Orpin?"

"Yes. But the horror of the business to me is that my wife should have tried to bribe this man to silence. The story will read well in the papers—won't it?"

"We must keep it out of the papers."

"What do you advise?"

"An immediate examination of Orpin's claims. Do I understand you to say that Mousie passed herself off to Miss Bosman as my wife?"

"No doubt about it," said Chips gloomily "And there is more; she has some extraordinary reason for not wishing to meet this Orpin. I proposed to send for him at once; she became hysterical."

Arthur frowned. He remembered that his own wife had been unwilling to meet Max. Why? Was it possible that from the beginning the twins knew of or suspected the relationship and the possibility of losing their money? He shrank from the thought, and yet it stabbed him. Then he heard Chips saying, "I have told you first. Talk it over with your wife. To-morrow we will settle what is best to be done."

He got out of the brougham at Wyndquest House; and his horses carried Arthur on to Park Street. It was late in the afternoon, past seven, and he knew that his wife would be waiting for him. In the busiest part of the season she always found time to welcome her husband. He could see her gracious figure coming forward, the gay smile on her lips, the tenderness in her eyes. For such a woman there could be no compromise between honour and dishonour.

Meanwhile, Bridget was standing alone in her pretty drawing-room, thinking of her husband. At last she had determined to tell him the truth, had chosen the very phrases by which that truth might be clothed. She declined all engagements for that evening. He and she would dine alone, and then—and then she would whisper the story. Of what had come to pass at Wyndquest House she was absolutely ignorant. Daphne went her own way, refusing her twin, not only confidence, but companionship. Her face was very sad, till she heard the horses stop at her door; then she went downstairs with the smile upon her lips which Arthur knew so well.

As he came towards her, she could read trouble in

his eyes, and when she kissed him, she murmured, "What is it?"

He led the way into his study. Such men as Wyndquest often say too little, because they are afraid of saying too much; under stress of feeling, they assume an abruptness almost brutal. Because Arthur loved his wife profoundly, he became hard and harsh, for he was thinking not of her, but of the sister who had done evil.

"Quest has told me an amazing story."

Into Bridget's clear eyes crept a tiny shadow of fear.

"Yes," she faltered.

"Your sister, it seems, has assumed your name. Quest found it out by accident."

He paused. To Bridget his words conveyed but one meaning. He knew. Her confession had been too long delayed. Dismay found expression in a sigh.

"Have you anything to say?" he asked.

She raised her eyes to his, appealingly. Wyndquest's face hardened. His wife looked like a guilty woman, and he had seen conscious guilt too often to be deceived.

"Whatever I have done," she said passionately, "I have done for your sake, because I love you."

"Then it *is* true?"

"Yes; it is true."

"Oh, my God!"

Bridget smiled bitterly. Further appeal at the moment would be futile, she reflected. She could even look at the matter from Arthur's point of view, could understand his horror and amazement.

"I will go to my room," she said, not without dignity.

"Yes," he replied constrainedly; "I must think, I—I must be alone."

Soon after he went out. The house oppressed him. Every familiar object, the pictures on the walls, the Chippendale furniture, the china, had been bought with the money which belonged to Max. Unconsciously he walked eastward, striding along with unseeing eyes up Piccadilly, through Leicester Square, past the

National Gallery, till he came to Westminster Bridge. The muddy, yellow waters were swirling through the arches, but the river itself was glorified by reason of a haze which obscured all that was unlovely and lent an ethereal glow to the huge buildings on the Embankment. As he gazed up and down the slowly moving stream he reflected that this was the London of his dreams, a city purged of what was foul and unclean. Standing there, the chatter and clamour of a crowd disturbed his thoughts. A dead body had just been brought to shore, some wretched waif and stray of the streets. Wyndquest saw the face, thin, drawn out, but calm with the peace of the summer's evening upon it. He had been tempted, during his dun days of misery and poverty, to seek the oblivion of the river; now he wondered idly what had restrained him.

"Lor'!" said a voice at his elbow, "it's Mr. Wyndquest."

He looked down and saw Pretty.

"It's you, is it?" he said stupidly. It seemed fitting somehow that she should be there. With an effort he asked her how she did.

"Max has chucked me," she answered. "Didn't Mrs. Wyndquest tell yer?"

"No, no;" he spoke irritably. "Why did he leave you?"

"I think he's come into money," the girl answered; "he just dropped me like a hot potato. I ain't complaining. I've got my baby, and I've got work—in a sweet factory, across the river. We was working overtime to-night. That's why I'm late. Mrs. Wyndquest has been begging me to take mother down to Hampsheer, but I do hate to leave London. You see, I've had my good times in London."

Wyndquest was silent. He was thinking of the money which had lured Max from this poor girl, of the money, the greed of gold, which interposed its barrier between himself and his wife. If it had been anything else, he reflected. But he had admired and

loved her generosity, honour, unselfishness. And all the time she and her sister had kept a poor devil of a painter, their own flesh and blood, out of his inheritance. It was incredible.

"I hope you're happy," said Pretty timidly, preparing to take her leave. "Max used to read me your speeches, and we said because you was there," she indicated the splendid façade of the Houses of Parliament, "you wouldn't forget them as was here," and she pointed to the myriad chimneys and roofs upon the Surrey side of the river.

Wyndquest regarded her more attentively; her last words sank into his mind, startling him from the apathy into which he had fallen. Had he been thinking of others, of the toiling millions whose joys and sorrows he had once shared? Had he not rather been absorbed in his own prosperity? He turned to Pretty and took her hand.

"Pretty," he said slowly, speaking in the measured, emphatic tones of the man who weighs his words, "I once tried to help you, and God knows whether I did good or ill. I left you, perhaps, when you most needed a friend. That is past. You ask me if I am happy. I am not. Do we deserve happiness—you and I? I cannot answer for you; you cannot answer for me. But between us, like this bridge, stretches sin and suffering, the link between rich and poor. I cannot tell you why meeting you here, at this particular hour, has lightened my burden; but so it is. You can make it still easier if you will give me your word to leave London. It is no place for your mother, no place for your baby. Go and *work*—in Hampshire."

"I'll try it," said Pretty, after a pause. "It won't be a front seat at a circus for *me*, but I'll try it."

Wyndquest bade her good-night. "She has more pluck than I," he reflected. "She loses Max, and instead of whining she goes to work. I must go to work." Then he went on to the Carlton Club and ordered a cutlet. He could not return to Park Street.

Much to his annoyance many men, some of them in high places, came up and greeted him with marked attention; one and all alluded in more or less congratulatory terms to his speeches in Scotland. After trying to eat the cutlet he smoked a cigar; and his friends seemed to understand that he wished to be left alone.

While he was reflecting that duty constrained him to live with a woman other than what he had believed his wife to be, a man sauntered up and took the seat beside him. He was known at St. Stephen's as the *âme damnée* of the Prime Minister, and it was his business and pleasure to do certain things which that great man, his master, told him to do. He addressed Wyndquest very cheerily, and offered him a fresh cigar, which Arthur refused somewhat coldly. Nothing daunted, the man smiled and began to speak in a portentous whisper.

"I have come down from the House on purpose to see you. Word came to us that you were here. You are wanted, my dear Wyndquest, badly wanted. Between ourselves, in the very strictest confidence, I think I am justified in saying that the political opportunity of your life is coming to you to-night."

"Indeed?" said Arthur.

"God bless my soul! What a cool hand you are! Yes, my dear fellow, your work in Scotland has borne fruit. I am instructed to ask you, unofficially, if you will go at once to South Africa as a secret agent of the Government. When we say at once, we mean at once—you understand? It is most important—how important I need not point out to you—that we should know how far your speeches are justified by the facts. You have never been in South Africa. Your opinions, valuable as we admit them to be, are of necessity gleaned from information which has come to you from others. You have taken the position that war is inevitable. You have submitted certain arguments which have had a marked effect upon the country. But, you will pardon me, you are a young man, and the author

of a novel highly imaginative, as well as realistic—it was the realism in it which appealed to me—and so it is held by some—not by me, my dear fellow, not by *me*, but by some—that these opinions of yours should be strengthened—or—or—weakened by a visit to South Africa. I make no promises, but if, on your return, those opinions should be fortified by personal experience, and if time should justify them—why, then, my dear Wyndquest, you would have placed Her Majesty's Government under obligations to you. I hope I have made myself clear."

"Quite clear. I cannot go."

"This is midsummer madness," urged the other, growing warm. "However," he rose to his feet, "I am not instructed to take back your final answer to-night. The offer is open for twenty-four hours. At the end of that time I am sure that you will see your way to accept it. Good God, sir, if my chief ordered me to the North Pole——"

"You would charter a whaler at once; I am sure of it."

The *âme damnée* bustled away. Arthur walked home.

When he reached the house in Park Street, his servant told him that Mrs. Wyndquest had gone to Wyndquest House. Bridget had left a note behind her.

"For the moment" (she wrote) "you do not want me; my sister does; so I have gone to her."

The note puzzled Arthur. A woman guilty of a detestable premeditated meanness could hardly have written it, he reflected. At such a time, such a woman would have thought not of a sister but of herself. He sat for some hours smoking and thinking; then he went to bed to pass a wretched and sleepless night.

CHAPTER XXI

"CAN YOU TELL ONE FROM T'OTHER?"

ON the morrow, soon after ten o'clock, he was standing beneath the portico of Wyndquest House. His first question conveyed, even to Seckford, his anxiety in regard to his wife, and he followed the butler upstairs and into a Paris *bonbonnière* of a room with steps that betrayed impatience. After a minute's delay Bridget appeared, very pale.

"Don't kiss me," she faltered, as he approached. She had learned from Daphne the facts. Daphne, indeed, told nearly all the truth. More, she had persuaded Bridget to plead her cause with Chips, who had listened patiently to so kind and able an advocate. Bridget did not attempt to gloss her sister's weakness, but she made it plain to Chips that he was not the one to condemn and punish the sinner.

"You went away last night," said Bridget to her husband, "believing that I, your wife, had kept possession of a fortune that was not mine. How could you? How could you?"

Meeting her candid, impassioned gaze, he asked himself the same question.

"You said it was true."

"I said it was true that my sister had taken me name." Arthur was puzzled, but the dominant feeling was one of relief.

"As for Max, he may have a claim upon our father's estate. I heard nothing about it till last night."

"I beg your pardon," said Arthur humbly.

"Wait."

But while he waited the door opened and Chips appeared. His right arm was in a sling, and upon his forehead was a discoloured swelling.

"Look here," he said to Arthur in his bluff voice, "I suppose what you and your wife have got to say to each other will keep, won't it? I want you downstairs at once."

Bridget let Arthur go. She could not speak before Chips, and although Daphne had consented that her husband should be told of the change of name, she had implored her twin to wait till the present impending clouds had rolled by. The young man—even Bridget admitted—must not be tried too severely.

"I have thrashed Festus," said Chips, a minute later, as soon as he and Arthur were alone. "It was not an easy job, but I did it well."

The cousins looked into each other's eyes.

"I am sure you did," said Arthur.

"He is a beast. And he was trying to ruin poor Mousie. She seems to have played the fool with him—nothing more, you understand?"

"No, no."

"All the same it's a hateful business," Chips burst out. "Now, then, who do you think turned up as I was thrashing the apostle? Why, the young man—Max. He seems a fairly good sort. Festus has been pullin' his leg too. He spoke very decently of you."

"He deserted the woman who loved him."

"There may be two sides to that story. At any rate, I've asked him to come here this morning. It may be irregular, but I said we'd listen to his yarn before calling in the lawyers. And I sent a wire to Mrs. Corny. She used to know Godfrey Romayne. I expect them both any minute."

"Festus showed fight," said Arthur.

Chips smiled grimly. "By God! we buck about our civilisation, but when it comes to certain things between man and man the only satisfactory solution is violence. Yes, he was game, I'll say that for him. I caught him as he was dressing for dinner. He had rather the best

of it—at first. I don't think he'll be dining out for a fortnight or so."

Arthur listened to further details. The fight had certainly cleared the atmosphere. Then Chips burst out again. "Your wife," said he vehemently, "is the best woman I know."

While he was speaking of her, Seckford admitted Mrs. Sparling, and a few minutes later presented a card, with "Mr. Maximilian Orpin" inscribed upon it.

"Show Mr. Orpin in here," said Chips.

Max was attired in a frock coat, and he wore a carnation. Looking at him, Wyndquest thought of Pretty returning late at night from her ten hours' grind in a factory. He bowed to the young man coldly; and Max—despite his feathers—did not appear at ease.

"I left you with Festus," said Quest, after the usual greeting had been exchanged. "How is he?"

"He is in bed," said Max. "I called upon him this morning to obtain possession of these documents." He laid a small sheaf upon the table. "I learn for the first time that he is my uncle, my mother's brother."

"Here is his record," said Mrs. Corny, handing a slip of paper to Lord Quest.

"How did you get this?" said he.

"I wired to New York for it, my dear Chips, and in New York you can get anything, if you pay for it."

"I always said you were a wonderful woman." He read the paper and passed it on to the others. The doctor's record, for an apostle of sinlessness, was certainly surprising.

"I was ignorant of this," said Max.

"I asked you here because I was convinced of that," said Chips. "May we look at your certificates?"

Max laid on the table two attested copies of certificates taken from county records in California. These set forth that Godfrey Romayne had contracted marriage with two persons: one a spinster, aged eighteen, the mother of Max; the other a widow—she who had been known as "Fluff."

"These seem to be properly attested copies," said Mrs. Corny, speaking in a business-like tone, and peering through her spectacles at the seals of the Notaries Public.

"Here is a death certificate," said Max. "Compare the dates. My mother, according to this paper, died after the second marriage."

"Your mother may have divorced or been divorced from Godfrey Romayne," suggested Wyndquest.

"I never heard of any divorce proceedings," said Mrs. Corny.

"And here is my certificate of birth," said Max, producing the fourth and last document.

"This also seems to be in order," said Mrs. Corny. A silence followed, which Max broke.

"I received these papers this morning," said Max, "and with them the following story. My mother, it seems, was the sister of Paul Festus. She was a pretty girl, teaching school in Santa Clara county, California, when Godfrey Romayne secretly married her. He belonged to one of the best Boston families, and at that time was a poor man. My mother married him and lived with him for a couple of years; then she left him, shortly after my birth, taking me with her. It seems I was an encumbrance," the young man's voice grew very bitter, "so my mother determined to send me back to my father. Accordingly, she wrote a letter, as from her death-bed, entreating Godfrey Romayne to provide for me, who—she said—would be sent to him as soon as she, the writer, was in her grave. My father took me in. After a time he married again. I am told that he was a reserved and proud man. Not suspecting fraud, he probably made no inquiries."

"That would be like him," said Mrs. Corny.

"But he never treated me as a son," said Max. "I was brought up as nobody's child."

Those present, marking the bitterness of his voice, were profoundly sorry for the speaker. "Poor boy!" muttered Mrs. Corny.

"Then I ran away to become an artist. Godfrey

Romayne sent me money, which I spent. When I applied for more he wrote harshly. Finally his remittances ceased. I do not blame him. He had been told of the life I was leading, a life at variance with his New England conception of what was fitting. I felt that I was not wanted; so I let myself drop out—not knowing, of course, that I was his son. He believed me to be dead. That's all."

"Thank you," said Quest gravely. "I told you last night that if a wrong had been done to you, directly or indirectly, my cousin and I would try to right it. Those who are competent to do so will examine your claims."

"I only claim one-third of my father's estate," said Max, "I should like to meet the twins and tell them so."

"You shall see them at once," said Chips, rising from his chair and walking towards the door. "I will fetch them." He ran upstairs and into the room where the sisters were sitting. He felt now that the twins had misunderstood Max, and the present seemed an excellent opportunity to adjust relations amicably. Max had a strong case. No one could blame him if he claimed his share.

Daphne smiled feebly when she saw her husband. She had begun, as usual, to tell herself that things had turned out for the best. She had had a narrow escape; she had been perilously near the rocks. To lose your fortune was an affliction indeed, but to lose as well good name and social position, that she could not have survived. And so, grateful to Chips because he had stretched out his strong arm, she greeted him sweetly, with such an exquisite adjustment of timidity, repentance, and wistful clinging affection that the big fellow bent down and kissed her.

"Poor little frightened Mousie," he said; and then he frowned slightly because Bridget turned away and looked out of the window.

"You won't scold me any more, will you?" murmured Daphne. "I shall kill myself if you are unkind."

"You mustn't say such things," whispered Chips. "And now, my dears, I want you to come downstairs with me. Mrs. Corny is in the library and somebody else who is anxious to meet you."

The sisters followed him, having no idea that Max was in the house; and honest Chips chuckled at what he called his *finesse*. Daphne would certainly have refused to meet this young man who was behaving so very decently, and such a slight might possibly have warped an otherwise nice sense of justice. Chips was no mammon-worshipper, but the possibility of losing an income of many thousands had preyed upon his mind. At this moment he, too, was beginning to think that things had turned out for the best. Mousie, poor little dear, had had her lesson; Festus—he could smile now when he thought of Festus—had had his. Accordingly Chips smiled as he walked down the staircase—enjoying his joke, the surprise he had so cleverly prepared.

The sisters, in the dim light peculiar to London libraries, shook hands with Mrs. Corny without recognising Max, who was standing with his back to the window. Then Chips said in his loudest, cheeriest voice: "Now, then, Daphne, Bridget, let me present an old friend of yours who has behaved most splendidly."

Max did not offer to shake hands. He had seen the faces of the twins quiver and change with something more than surprise. Mrs. Corny and Arthur marked the same expression, but Chips, being behind, saw nothing.

"Now, then," he continued, "which is which? Can you tell one from t'other?"

As he spoke, Daphne came forward, holding out her hand. She had recovered her self-possession, and was smiling. Bridget bowed, thinking of Pretty. At that moment the sisters were hardly alike, so great was the difference of expression between the smiling Daphne and the grave Bridget, a difference, reflected Mrs. Corny, as great as that between Louisiana and New England. Daphne, at this dramatic moment,

was as truly the daughter of the Creole as her sister was the child of Godfrey Romayne.

"I can tell them apart easily," said Max quietly. "To me it is astonishing that there should be any question. If you ask them, they will tell you that as a boy I never confounded them."

"Which is which?" said Chips obstinately.

Mrs. Corny opened her mouth to speak, and then closed it again. Across her pleasant face flitted that vagabond sprite, Fear.

"That is Bridget," he indicated Bridget. "This is Daphne, Wyndquest's wife."

Chips laughed.

"Wrong."

"Impossible."

The peer frowned.

"May I look at your hand?" said Max to Bridget. Mrs. Corny came to the rescue.

"People change. I should never have recognised you, Mr. Orpin, although I saw you not ten years ago."

"May I look at your hand?" repeated Max, looking earnestly at Bridget. He was plainly confused. "Or yours," he turned quickly to Daphne.

"Show your hand," commanded her husband. "This doubting Thomas must be made to believe."

Daphne turned her pretty dimpled hand palm upwards. She came from a country where the game of poker is studied as a science, and she knew the value of "bluffing." Max bent over it; when he looked up he was smiling.

"You tried to fool me," he said, "and you nearly succeeded."

"What do you mean?" said Chips.

"I knew I could not be mistaken. This is Daphne's hand. It is quite different from Bridget's. Look at that broken line of heart. Don't you remember how I used to tease you about it? Why, I could swear to that line before all the cherubim and seraphim. I——"

He paused. Daphne had grown very pale, and into

her eyes came the frightened expression of an animal at bay. She raised her hand to her throat, and tottered forward into Quest's arms.

"She has fainted," said Mrs. Corny. "It is the heat." Then, as Chips laid his wife upon a sofa, she whispered to Max, who was standing apart: "You had better go. Seeing you again after all that has happened must have been too great a shock."

Max obeyed instantly, not suspecting the truth, and believing that Arthur's wife had fainted. Arthur accompanied the young man to the front door. He (Arthur) appeared coldly severe, and Max misinterpreted the expression. "Of course, you are down on me," he said defiantly, "but I couldn't stand the drunken mother—and there were other reasons. I—I stampeded."

"I do not judge you," said Wyndquest wearily. "There are times in a man's life when it must be an irresistible temptation to stampede."

He returned to the library, and walked up to his wife, who stood apart from the group around the sofa.

"You are Bridget," he said.

"Yes, I am Bridget," she answered. "I—I cannot explain now."

"I have not asked for explanations," he replied.

Chips left the sofa, and came towards her; his face was scarlet and his eyes congested.

"I ask for explanations," he said loudly. "I want them now, by God!"

"Will you please leave us *women* alone?" said Mrs. Corny. "You shall have your explanations when your wife is fit to make them, and you"—she faced his angry eyes without flinching—"and you are fit to receive them."

"Did you know of this?" said Chips, in a quieter tone.

"I guessed it nearly three weeks ago."

She returned to the sofa with Bridget.

"Let us go," said Arthur.

The men left the house, and walked across the Park into Kensington Gardens. Presently they found an empty bench beneath some trees not far from the round pond, and here they sat for awhile, idly watching the children at play, thinking their thoughts to the tinkle of babies' laughter and prattle.

"They changed names," said Arthur suddenly, "upon the day that I was pitched out of the dogcart. Daphne didn't want me, and she did want you. Bridget consented to the fraud."

"That's it. I remember that Bridget had been as cold as liquid air, and then—that very morning—she seemed to warm up."

"We were easily hoodwinked."

"We were in love," said Chips curtly.

They sat on, silent, for nearly an hour. The nursemaids eyed them furtively, reading melodrama in their sombre faces and the right arm in a sling. A passing policeman, recognising the peer, saluted respectfully.

"I say," said Chips, "we can't sit here and let the world stare at us. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I do. For the sake of the kid there must be no scandal—eh?" Arthur nodded. "But I can't kiss and make friends. There's been too much of that. I'm talking plainly. I wanted to marry Bridget, who has ballast, and I got the other, who—who hasn't. It's a pill to swallow. And there's Max. Now, I propose to go to California to investigate his claim on the spot. I shall get the best advice and find out the truth. My wife can go to Quest and learn to live quietly."

"Do nothing hastily," said Arthur, rising.

They recrossed the Park, feeling the better for the fresh air and exercise. Wyndquest marked the sun-burned stretches of turf, so vividly green in June, and the flowers beginning to droop and wither beneath their burden of dust. "Ichabod!" he murmured to himself.

Seckford received them, and said that the ladies had left the house. Upon the hall table was a letter for Arthur, and a telegram. He read the letter first:

"You do not ask for explanations," wrote Bridget, "so I shall not offer them. Mrs. Sparling is willing to answer any questions you may put to her. I feel for you deeply—the more so, perhaps, because you have misjudged me, not once but twice. If you could look into my heart . . . but that is impossible. Before we married, I wished to tell you all, and you refused to listen. I knew then, as I know now, that I ought to have spoken. For the present, it is better that we should not meet; so I have gone to Poplar. Daphne is with Mrs. Sparling."

Bridget might have added that her sister had refused to accompany her to Poplar, on the plea that she needed cheering up—a tonic, seemingly, not to be had for love or money east of Temple Bar. But if Bridget's burdens were not lightened because her sister preferred Mrs. Corny's companionship to hers, the reader may assume that they were not seriously increased. None the less, Daphne's frivolity, heartlessness, and hysteria obscured Bridget's sense of justice. The letter to her husband was too curt, too hard, and the man who received it was in no mood to read between the lines the love and anguish which pride denied expression.

Arthur crushed the letter into his pocket, and opened the telegram, which had been forwarded from the Carlton Club, and also from his own house. It was from the *âme damnée*:—

"Do you accept mission? You must sail at once. Yes or no?"

Wyndquest stared at the slip of pink paper. Had he opened the telegram first, his answer to it might have been different. The sight of Bridget's handwriting stirred his heart. If she had explained, doubtless

he would have followed her to Poplar—or anywhere else—but her coldness froze his thawing sensibilities. She was right. Time alone could adjust their relations. He would accept the mission.

As he was writing acceptance on a blank form, Chips came into the library, and learned what had passed. Arthur gave him Bridget's letter; and the young man laughed scornfully when he read it.

"They are Americans," he said, with an air of conviction that might have provoked a smile from Wyndquest at any other time. "My wife has not written to me at all; but she, and her maid, and four large trunks have left the premises. Some d——d manicurist was coming to-morrow morning, and she left word that he was to follow her to Cadogan Square. She could think of that, by God!"

"You have Betty," said Arthur, after a pause.

"Yes, she forgot her; she's upstairs. I'm going to send her down to Quest this afternoon to my mother."

"Oh!" Having acted himself upon the spur of emergency, Wyndquest found himself surprised at his cousin's hasty decision.

"As for me," continued Chips, "I shall cut all engagements, and go to California."

"I think you ought to stay in England," said Arthur hesitatingly.

"You preach what you are unwilling to practise," retorted the other.

Both men sailed without seeing their wives, but as his ship was leaving Southampton Docks, Arthur standing aft, thought that he discerned Bridget in the person of a tall, thickly-veiled woman dressed in black. He waved his hand impulsively, and the black figure waved a handkerchief in reply. Arthur was convinced that it was his wife, and for the moment he was tempted to throw overboard himself, his mission, and all that mission involved. He gazed across the silvery waters, marking the white wake of the huge ship as she sped forward. And he stood, absorbed in thought, till the Needles were passed, and the coast

of Hampshire a mere azure speck upon the starboard quarter.

"I am leaving this dear country for what?" he reflected. Presently he went below, where he found many farewell letters and telegrams; some of them signed with famous names. One was unsigned, and contained but four words: "God be with you." Wyndquest placed it carefully in his pocket-book. It came from his wife.

CHAPTER XXII

WHICH TAKES THE READER TO POPLAR

QUEST left England a week later; but before departure he insisted upon certain arrangements which were carried out, not without protest on Daphne's part. During his absence she agreed to live at Quest, under the eye of the Dowager: an all-seeing orb. It was publicly stated that Lord Quest had been obliged to start for California at a moment's notice in order to investigate certain claims against the Romayne estate; all England guessed why Wyndquest had sailed for South Africa; so such talk as did arise soon died down. The family was not told of the twins' change of name; but Chips, anxious in regard to the legitimacy of little Betty, consulted his lawyer, who assured him that the marriages had been perfectly legal.

Although Quest refused to meet his wife, he saw Bridget on the day before he travelled down to Liverpool. He drove from his club in St. James's Street to Poplar, and was amazed to find that London east of the Mansion House is an immense city. Not particularly observant, he was profoundly impressed by the character of the houses, the endless rows of buildings exactly alike, the lack of contrast, the dun colour, the general expression of overcrowding. Chips confessed to Bridget that he had hardly dared to draw an honest breath passing through Stepney and Bethnal Green, although he had filled his lungs with oxygen while his hansom was skirting Victoria Park.

"I had no idea of the East End," he said.

"Ah!" said Bridget. "Do you know that here in

London nine hundred thousand persons are breaking the law by living huddled up like sheep?"

The young man expressed his surprise. Then he added nervously, "I suppose one is more alive to this overcrowding when one is being jostled a bit oneself."

"That is what Arthur always said."

"I've come here to speak about Arthur. You did not see him?"

"Yes, I went to Southampton. I fancy he saw me—at the last. He waved his hand."

"Good Lord! You let him go without an explanation?"

"He did not ask for one."

"Really," said Chips angrily, "considering that you and he are supposed to have brains, I must say that you have behaved like a couple of silly children. It was not your fault," he concluded vehemently.

"I was very weak," said Bridget.

She went to a desk and unlocked the middle drawer. As she was doing so, Quest glanced with interest at the simple furnishings of the room; everything plain but substantial—English, and yet not lacking the ingenuity of the Yankee—for the letter files, the copying presses, the typewriter, were from over seas. And Bridget herself, bending over her desk, in a dress of severe cut, was English too, and yet American, in her bearing, in the delicacy of her hands and feet, in the curves of her figure.

"You work here?" he said, as she turned to him with a letter in her hand.

"Certainly. Did you suppose I came to Poplar to play the fine lady?"

"I thought you—er—played the goddess. I dare swear the people here worship you."

Bridget blushed, sensible that Chips' honest eyes were too full of affection.

"And I should think, also, that this power of inspiring devotion in others would make you happy," he continued reflectively, not marking the faint colour in Bridget's cheeks.

"Read Arthur's letter," said Bridget in response. And Chips interpreted the answer as an admission that she had not been able to inspire devotion in her own husband.

"I have been offered," wrote Wyndquest, "and have accepted a mission to South Africa, pledging myself to start at once. It is your wish that we should not meet for a time, and although it is terrible to me to leave England without bidding you good-bye, still it may be wise. I am obliged, in a sense, to reconstruct you, and you, no doubt, see me from a different point of view. You accuse me of misjudging you cruelly—*twice*. I misjudged you once only, when I believed for twelve wretched hours that you had been tempted to retain a fortune which was not yours. For the rest, I know that your sister forced your hand, that you were compelled to play an odious part out of consideration for her and me. When you wished to speak, I begged you to be silent. Now, the results of what has been done stare us in the face. Time and thought may adjust them, nothing else can."

"Make no mistake," said Chips gravely, "the man who wrote this loves you still. My dear—cheer up!"

Bridget said nothing.

"I came here," said Chips, in a different tone, "to say good-bye. I have arranged about that cottage for Mrs. Parslow and her daughter: the agent has instructions."

She was touched by his thoughtfulness, and thanked him warmly, adding that she would send Pretty down at once.

"Does it really satisfy you, this working and planning for others?" he asked as he bade her good-bye.

"I should not be satisfied without it," she answered evasively.

When he had gone, she felt very lonely. During the past week her sensibilities had been torn and rent like Cæsar's mantle; and she was in no mood to sit down and darn them. However, there was work to be done, and letters to be answered. Amongst these she

found one from an old friend, a Californian, who had married a ne'er-do-well Englishman, a drunkard and bully, who squandered her money, and then left her to starve in genteel poverty with a couple of children.

"I owe money," wrote the unhappy mother, "to a struggling doctor and half a dozen poor tradesmen: bills incurred during the illness of my baby. So long as we are well I can support my children and myself, but sickness has exhausted my resources. I have brought myself to ask you for money to pay these debts, which, without your help, will, I fear, remain unpaid."

Bridget went to see her friend.

"Oh, my dear," she said, "why did you wait and suffer so long? Of course I will pay these miserable bills, and you must let me help you to go to the seaside for a holiday. A loan? Yes, yes; you will pay it back with compound interest, not in money perhaps, but in other ways. Obligations! Nonsense! Why, it is a pleasure, a privilege, to feel that what I can do for you will be repaid not to *me*, but to others."

Another woman, a factory girl, whom she had befriended at a critical time, nearly a year before, came to her and thanked her, with wet eyes, for what she had done. The girl had been turned out of a factory for misconduct. Bridget obtained for her work elsewhere, stipulating, as was her habit, that the other, when opportunity served, should do as much for one in distress. The idea had bloomed in the girl's heart, and was bearing fruit; already she had rescued more than half a dozen waifs and strays.

But there was so much misery which Bridget could not relieve! She remained in London during the dog days of August, when the fierce sun seemed to riot like a mad beast in narrow pestilential courts and alleys.

She heard from Arthur, but the letter was full of details connected with his mission. She knew that having undertaken it he would devote himself to it,

unweariedly, till it was accomplished. What would happen then?

Mrs. Corny, passing through London, on her way from Scotland to Homburg, came to see her; and spent an afternoon in Poplar, asking innumerable questions in her business-like manner. She had paid other visits before, and had sent Bridget many cheques. At first, nothing was said concerning the rift within the House of Quest; Bridget explained her new system of charity organisation, the efforts she was making to induce her girls to realise that the debt which they owed primarily to her must be paid in kind to others, and that these in their turn must be made to promise to work along the same lines.

"A golden chain of love," said Mrs. Corny. "It was the secret of Christ's influence. As you say, my dear, money is like water; it may nourish or destroy. Pouring it wholesale into the slums is like pouring it on to a desert of sand. One never sees it again. You are on the right track. And this loan system of yours preserves the self-respect of the borrowers."

She listened, winking and blinking, to more details, interposing here and there a suggestion, a criticism, a laugh.

"But how," she demanded, in conclusion, "can you expect a return from some of your people, the most ignorant and depraved?"

Bridget cited the case of the girl of whom mention has been made. "I don't expect much," she added, "but I let them think I expect a good deal. Of course, I see hardly anything of the hardened sinners. I work amongst the girls and children. Again and again I have seen some starving urchin divide the bun I've given him with a friend, and after they have eaten it I have heard them laughing together as if they were in Arcadia. No. Our difficulty has been, not the stimulating of their gratitude, but the directing of it That is hard. To make them understand that unless they elevate themselves they cannot hope to elevate others. I begin with their heads, but I hope to end with their hearts."

"Eh, eh?"

"I teach all our girls to take care of their hair. Some of them have lovely hair. It's the thin end of the wedge."

Mrs. Sparling was eager to visit a small factory started by Bridget and her friends for the manufacture of soldiers' clothes. "People are always asking for results," said Bridget, as she paused at the door. "Well, you have been over many factories, and you can read the writing on the wall. I ask you to look at the faces of our girls."

They passed through a small hall into a well-ventilated room where some dozen girls were busily engaged in cutting out tunics from patterns furnished by the Government. Mrs. Corny noted that each girl smiled as Bridget entered the room, and she noted also that each wore her hair after the fashion set by Mrs. Wyndquest.

"This is Mrs. Sparling," said Bridget. "You all know that she generously helped us to lease and equip this building. She would like to ask you some questions."

The girls grinned sympathetically, eyeing the visitor's brown face and twinkling eyes, as they answered her sharp questions, Where and how did they live? What did they eat? What were their amusements? What did they read? Each replied civilly, not servilely, which delighted a woman who, though born a Van Cortlandt, was essentially a democrat. The girls either boarded together in pairs or threes, contributing so much to the common purse, or paid a fixed sum—about five shillings a week—to their parents; this left a surplus, from five to ten shillings, to be spent as they pleased. They subscribed (all of them) to a reading room, a dancing-hall, where dances were held once a week, and a soup-kitchen. In the other rooms, each room being set apart for particular uses as in large factories, the same questions were put, and the same answers received, with this difference—the girls entrusted with the more delicate and difficult tasks had

a livelier manner, a quick responsiveness, and even a sense of humour. At the top of the building two girls were wrangling over the performance of some little duty. Bridget went forward at once.

"You two babies," she exclaimed, so pleasantly that Mrs. Corny ceased to wonder at the discipline maintained throughout the factory. "You two babies! I wonder which ought to be slapped."

"Slap 'er," said the smaller; "she's bin 'ere, one o' your gals, longer'n me."

Everybody laughed, and order reigned.

While Bridget was speaking with one of the forewomen, Mrs. Corny looked about her. One girl attracted her attention. She was what is known in New York as a "hoodlum." The features were those of the *décadente*; the narrow forehead retreated, as if ashamed of itself, into a shock of coarse unmanageable red curls; the chin came forward, unduly assertive; the eyes, set too close together, were as pin-points gleaming with extraordinary brilliancy above a nose which had seemingly essayed the impossible feat of adapting itself to brow and chin; retiring at the bridge where it should advance, and expanding into a bulbous breadth of tip and nostril, where contraction was most expedient. The large, thick lips, carious teeth, and the thin neck bore the *stigmata* of scrofula. Mrs. Corny, having absent-mindedly gazed rather too hard at this young woman, was brought to a sense of what she had done by the girl saying sharply:

"I'm the belle o' the ball, I am! What price my fyce?"

"Bless my soul!" said Mrs. Corny, "if I was staring at you it was unintentional, and I beg your pardon. Ah, well, the pretty ones don't have it all their own way, my dear. Look at my face! I have heard a kind friend say that it was ugly enough to stop a clock, but I have grown to like it because it gives so little trouble. Pretty faces are often like pretty dresses: all show and no wear. Most of 'em can't stand either rain or shine."

The girl was grinning appreciatively before Mrs. Corny had finished speaking.

"Rain allus himproved mine," she observed, thinking of the times when she ran about the gutters unwashed. "And the sun give me a bit o' colour."

"Say," said Mrs. Corny softly and swiftly, "what do you think of Mrs. Wyndquest?"

"Think of 'er?" echoed the girl, returning Mrs. Corny's unconscious wink. "Why, I ain't never bin taught to think, but I'll tell yer—you 'it 'er *'ard*, an' see wot'll happen. The gals in this 'ere room 'd tear yer limb from limb, yus, they would, jist as sure as my name's Susan Marier. Think of 'er! Oh, Lor'!"

"But others," murmured the sly Mrs. Corny, "others come and work amongst you."

Susan Marier stuck her tongue into her cheek; she had certainly not paid the proverbial dole for manners.

"Others? I dessay. But—yer read the pipers, don't yer?—she's one o' the swells, she's rich, she's luvly, she's young, she's *one o' the very best*, an' she comes down Poplar wy an' makes friends with—*us*."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Corny. "You may not be able to think, my dear, but you can talk good horse sense."

"The others!" continued the girl, in the same excited whisper. "I dessay they mean well, but most on 'em look as if they wasn't particlerly wanted anywheres, and some on 'em wears clothes I wouldn't fancy myself—poor old dowds! But she—oh, my crikey! I sy, I'll tell yer somethink. She give me 'er picture, yus, she did. None o' yer tin-types, but a five-an'-sixpenny cabinet—full dress; and look 'ere, this is between you an' me, I'm savin' up ter buy a fryme for it that'll astonish Percy Terrace, which is where I live."

Now, Mrs. Corny had sworn that she would not give money to any of Bridget's girls, but at this moment

she extracted a sovereign from her pocket and slipped it into the girl's hot palm, as she bade her good-bye.

"But I sy," Mrs. Corny's arm was touched, "yer've myde a mistyke. This ain't a bob, it's a golden suvrun."

"It's a little bit of all right," said Mrs. Corny hurriedly. "Hush, hush, my dear! A golden sovereign will buy a silver frame."

Bridget was beckoning to her, and together they went downstairs and out into the street. Presently Bridget said in an injured tone:

"Letty, you gave one of the girls money; I saw you. How could you—after all I said?"

Mrs. Corny was forced to make confession.

"The girl is on to you and on to herself," she concluded, enjoying the blushes on Bridget's cheek; "to obtain the best results the best must come here; and the best is none too good for the job."

Bridget insisted upon giving her guest a cup of tea, although Mrs. Corny entreated in vain for a whisky and soda. And when the tea was drunk, the wise lady spoke her mind, avowing the real object of her visit.

"My dear, who was it who said that flattery was the milk of human kindness turned to butter? I hope this factory of yours won't prove a creamery. However, we women can't get along without some butter."

"Give me the bread, quick," said Bridget.

"You ought to be in Quest, not in Poplar. Your sister needs you, and you know it!"

After Mrs. Corny had gone, Bridget went to her desk, and took from it a letter, which she had received a few days before.

"You darling" (wrote Daphne). "It was too sweet of you proposing to come to me, but for the present I am better *quite* alone. You won't think me a beast—will you? But your dear face *would* bring back all I have suffered and have been made to suffer. We did wrong; I can see that,

but the men have made an absurd fuss—haven't they? Chips made me chuck all my fall visits—so like a man—as if this wasn't the time above all others when one needed one's pals. Which reminds me that Birdie Hope wrote a charming letter: full of feeling. She has *such* feeling! Why, when poor Cuckoo" (Cuckoo was one of Birdie's young men) "was killed playing polo, she did not wear her diamonds *for a whole fortnight*!!! Of course, she hadn't the smallest idea what had happened, but she knew I was going to meet the dear Prince in Scotland, and she said she was sure there had been a row. I told her to come to me at once. I don't believe more than half the stories about her. How people who call themselves Christians and go to church can talk as they do amazes me. The county people have been too nice, but oh, oh, oh, *so* deadly dull! Since Birdie came I have seen none of them! The poor darling does put more than a tinge of pink on to her cheeks and into her talk, but then I never look at her face at all. What sensible woman would when you think that she wears the prettiest frocks in the kingdom! Talking of clothes, I'm sure that I've repented in sackcloth and ashes, and I'm beginning to feel like the Puritans did. I mean I am thinking of the restoration, when I shall let myself go. Birdie says that she never touches cream in Lent, because abstaining from it seems to clear her palate for the whole season. She is so amusing—and such a comfort. I know that Chips will be mad when he hears she's at Quest, and the old cat" (the Dowager, doubtless) "has not called on her, which is a blessing, but I'm not going to let him think that he has married a bread-and-butter miss. English husbands have such a lot to learn!

"I was seriously thinking of coming to work with you amongst your girls; it must be so *uplifting*; and one ought to do all the good one can—I have always said that. And it is a comfort to me to reflect that Chips turned over a new leaf after his marriage. Everybody says that he has got the estate into apple-pie order; and I told his mother she might give some of the credit to me. She sniffed so loudly that I daresay you heard her in Poplar. We are very good friends now, because when we meet—about twice a week—I contradict everything she says, and then let her bring me round to her way of thinking. I do make allowances for Chips when I pause and remember that she is his mother;

and it won't be my fault if darling little Betty is not a good woman. . . ."

Bridget slowly tore the letter into small pieces. "I couldn't show that to Letty," she reflected. "Perhaps she is right; she *is* right. I'll go to Quest, whether Daphne wants me or not."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PERVERSITY OF CIRCUMSTANCE

MAX called upon his maternal uncle, and reported curtly what had passed in the library at Wyndquest House. The apostle of sinlessness received his nephew with the nearest approach to a smile which a much-battered face admitted.

"My health," he said, with dignity, "will not suffer me to discuss what is past."

He listened attentively to the last few phrases of Max's report. The young man described the efforts of Quest to confound him, concluding with the dramatic fainting-fit.

"Wyndquest saw me to the door," he said. "A white man: one of the whitest, but cold-blooded The fact that his wife had just keeled over didn't seem to worry him a little bit."

"Ah!" murmured the apostle.

Max added that he had received a letter from Lord Quest, who proposed to visit California at an early date. The peer promised that if Max's claims proved valid *de facto* they would not be contested *de jure*. One-third of the Romayne estate would be handed over without a lawsuit.

"It's easy to be generous with what does not belong to you," remarked Festus, speaking from experience. "If you had been advised by me you would have held out for more. Curious—that fainting-fit of Mrs. Wyndquest's! If it had been the other, now, I —— You are sure that you were not fooled after all?"

"I saw her hand," said Max with conviction. "The

line of heart is very peculiar: queerly divided in the middle."

"Queerly divided in the middle," repeated the apostle.

"The other, whose hand I did not see, has the triple bracelet."

"It is all rubbish," murmured the apostle. "Well," he tried to smile again, "I must ask you to take my word—the word of a blood relation—that I acted for the best. I was using my influence with Lady Quest to bring about a satisfactory settlement. Her husband cruelly and grossly misunderstood me."

"You put up a good fight," said Max.

The man was his uncle—despite that tell-tale record; and Max's own record was not immaculate.

"He's going to California—is he?" said Festus, after a pause, "and I suppose he is taking his wife with him?"

"He is going alone," said Max. "As for me, I shall let things stand as they are till he gets back. I'm making money; doing well."

"You don't look well," said the apostle, eyeing Max's rather thin cheeks and brilliant eyes.

The young fellow slightly flushed. If he worked hard by day, he was sensible that his evenings were given to pleasure.

"I'm all right," he said constrainedly.

"Come and see me when you can," said the apostle.

Max returned to his own rooms in one of those large buildings for bachelors of small means. He had been going downhill since he left Pretty, and he knew it. Not that vice was particularly attractive to him, but he found the company of vicious men amusing. In his building were many with histories somewhat similar to his own; the "broken brigade," the "has beens," some of whom still possessed the charm of gentlemen, although shorn of everything else. Max was greeted by these roysterers and swashbucklers as hail-fellow-well-met, at a time when his own society was offensive to him. He had sent Pretty five more

pounds, giving his address, and the banknote had been returned without a line from her, although she could write well—far better, indeed, than she could speak. This silence, this refusal to accept for herself and their child *his* money rankled. Like most men of the artistic temperament, he was sensitive to the opinion of others.

When he reached his rooms, he glanced at them with disfavour. He was thinking of Grosvenor Square, when a card lying on the floor, evidently pushed beneath the locked door, arrested his attention. He picked it up; *Viscount Quest* was inscribed upon it. Max wondered what had brought the peer to the Soham Flats. He had some object, of course, beyond mere civility; and this visit following the letter, pricked Max's curiosity. At the back of the card scribbled in pencil was, "Will call again at nine to-night."

Almost mechanically, the young man began to make tidy his sitting-room. Some empty bottles were removed, and the ashes from many pipes and cigarettes swept up. Then he opened his window wide and looked out, whistling softly to himself. If he had little else, he possessed one of the finest views of London: a continual source of enjoyment in all weathers, a picture in which the artist found daily new beauties. Max, leaning with crossed arms upon the sill, absorbing the sights and sounds of Babylon, intoxicating himself with the material splendour of the scene, began to build castles in the air. He must have stood there nearly an hour. Then he cooked and ate his supper—an omelette (which he had learned to make in Montmartre), a salad, some cold meat, Gruyère, and a pint of Graves. He ate slowly, and when he had finished and cleared away, lit a spirit lamp and prepared some coffee, putting into his pot enough for two. The fragrance of the coffee was filling the room when his visitor arrived. Max offered coffee and a cigarette, which Quest accepted.

"Capital coffee," said he. "Wish my people would give me as good. And—by Jove!—what a view you have!"

"The prospect pleases," said Max, with an ironic smile. The peer eyed the painter, liking him better in an old shabby coat.

"You've had some queer experiences, I take it."

"Very queer," said Max.

"I should like to hear about them some day, when I get back from California."

"*Nous ne marchons pas dans le même chemin*," said Max, in a singularly pure accent. He told himself that he was a snob to air his French; and yet he was anxious to appear better than his surroundings.

"There are only two roads," said Quest moodily "One leads to Hell." Then he blurted out his story, the change of names by the twins, and all that change involved. "I feel this secret will be safe with you," he concluded. "Wyndquest and I saw that you suspected nothing yesterday morning. Well, the twins have seen fit to change names, and now they must stick to 'em. We can't have a scandal. I wouldn't have Festus get hold of it for anything."

Max felt uneasy, wondering whether he had excited his uncle's suspicions.

"I shan't give it away," said he. "And—and I appreciate the confidence you have placed in me."

"Oh, Wyndquest vouched for you. He said that you were as proud as Lucifer, and quite straight as between man and man."

Max frowned, sensible that his visitor had quoted Wyndquest correctly. "I suppose he told you my story?"

"Part of it."

"He is an idealist."

"He is one of the best fellows. You saw in the paper to-night that he sails for the Cape?"

"And you go to California; and I am here." Max laughed bitterly.

"Eh?"

"You don't see the connection? Each of us—for excellent reasons, no doubt—has returned to the single life."

But the peer was in no mood to discuss his domestic affairs with this stranger, and shortly after took his leave. Max returned to the open window. It was now night; and above and below twinkled myriads of lights: each representing an unknown world. Max laughed again. "There are only two roads," he repeated softly.

In the darkness of the summer's night his thoughts turned to Pretty living scarce half a mile away in the home that he had made for her—and destroyed. He was now proposing to build another home for himself—in fancy it was built already, and furnished from garret to cellar with the best that gold could buy. Would he care to live in it? His artistic perceptions and sensibilities assured him that the answer was doubtful. Presently, a journalist burst into his room—a big, bearded fellow, with a square, roughly-cut face, upon which might be seen the ugly lines of dissipation. "You've got the blues," he said, when Max refused to leave his window. "Come to my den, and I'll give you some whisky." Max shook his head, and the journalist withdrew more quietly than he had come. "That's the sort who takes things hard," he reflected, a moment later, as he mixed his own toddy. "That's the sort who takes things easy," Max, for his part, was thinking. How stupid this English Bohemian life was. He recalled with envy his student life in Paris, when he believed that he would live to paint a masterpiece. And then, like moving pictures flitting across a screen, he saw the gradual decay of his aims and ambitions. Paris had offered him her best and worst; he had taken the worst. At such times as these Max's reminiscences always ended with his illness, when he had so nearly died. After that, life had taken a new complexion. "I think I'll go and see Pretty," he said irresolutely. Again and again, since the night he had left her, he had said the same words. To-night the impulse was stronger than ever. He took his hat, and a minute later was walking swiftly down the King's Road. When he lived in the

Kenyon Buildings he had often walked up and down the King's Road; many of the shops were familiar to him: here he had bought his herrings, here a piece of furniture, there a second-hand carpet. Just ahead loomed the great building where he had spent nearly two years of his life, where his child—weak, sickly, little creature—had been born. As he approached, the huge mass of bricks and mortar seemed to quicken into life, as if it were a monster, opening its jaws to recapture some victim who had escaped. It was past ten when he tapped at the door of 143, but Pretty, he knew, never went early to bed in summer, no matter how early she might rise. The young man cursed himself, because in his heart he hoped she might be out, buying food for the morrow. However, she opened the door in person, and when she saw him, bade him enter, very soberly. She had changed greatly. An unobservant man would have pronounced her looking younger; Max saw at a glance that she was infinitely older, a woman grown, with a woman's experience written in fine lines about her mouth and temples.

"Oh, it's you," she said listlessly, but beneath her dark lashes the hazel eyes were gleaming.

"I came to see how you and the kid were getting along," he returned awkwardly. "You sent back the fiver. Why?"

"Hush! Baby's asleep. Sit down."

They had not shaken hands, but Max sat down. On the table, where a small lamp was burning, lay a pile of calico; and the sewing machine—around which clustered so many poignant associations—was standing ready for use. Max surveyed the room with a restless eye. Coming back, the comfort and homeliness of it impressed him. He had bought the furniture himself at second-hand shops bit by bit, and some of the bits were not bad. He and Pretty had saved and scraped to buy that corner cupboard, and the divan upon which he was sitting had been home-made out of an old mattress and four pillows. Books were within reach, and his pipes lay just as he had left them, close to the big tobacco

jar. It almost looked—he realised this with a start—as if he had been expected!

"Why did you send back the money?" he repeated softly, but with a sullen note in his voice.

"Because I didn't want it. I've got a job in Lambeth."

Max marked the independence of tone. She was now sewing, as if every second was of value. Not a word was said concerning the move to Hampshire. From the room adjoining came the sound of heavy breathing, for Mrs. Parslow, adjusting the balance between herself and daughter, retired early and rose late. Pretty interpreted Max's glance at the wall, and said curtly:

"She's behaving herself, because I give her nothing."

"You can't possibly pay the rent of these rooms," said Max irritably, puzzled by Pretty's attitude. He expected, to tell the truth, tears, perhaps abuse, possibly violence; this unnatural calm upset him.

"The rent is paid to Michaelmas; then I shall move."

"Where to?"

"That's none of your business, is it?"

She actually laughed, showing her nice, even teeth.

"You think I've treated you badly," said Max.

Pretty laid down her work, and clasped her hands, leaning her chin upon her knuckles in an attitude which Max had often transferred to paper.

"No, I don't," she said thoughtfully. "I've ciphered it out. And I've got it straight—dead straight, at last. I was a big silly to ever think that *you'd* stick to me."

The emphasis on the "you" stung the painter.

"You sized me up as fickle, eh?"

Pretty shrugged her shoulders indifferently, but her heart was beating—thumping against her ribs with such violence that she wondered if the sound of it was audible to Max.

"You never really cared," he said.

She turned her head aside.

He could not see the passion in her eyes; and yet

he must have known that she had learned to love him. He had been kind to her, had protected and cherished her. This means much to all women, but how much to a daughter of the slums? And he had inspired in her also an intellectual respect and consideration, the greater, perhaps, because it lay concealed beneath a keen sense of the ridiculous. Her hold on him would have been stronger, doubtless, had she expressed these feelings; for a man such as Max can do without cakes and ale more easily than he can forego appreciation.

More, he deliberately taught her to repress her feelings: those wild ebullitions and effusions, which had ended more than once in violence. Now, when she was yearning to throw herself at his feet, to tell him—whether he cared to listen or not—that she was his alone for ever, to take or to leave, she could find no words, only dumb, imploring glances, which he did not see.

"You cared for Wyndquest," said Max.

As he spoke the figure of Wyndquest seemed to tower between them, tall and impassive. Pretty could see his dark, cleanly-cut face, with the kind, all-seeing eyes. Yes, she had cared for him, but only as the child cares for a beloved teacher. The mere thought of Wyndquest standing to her in the same relation as Max brought a furious blush to her cheeks.

"No, no," she murmured.

"Your cheeks give you the lie."

Still she was silent. If she spoke she was sensible that she must use her vernacular—that dreadful vocabulary of the gutter, which this man loathed and scorned.

Max put on his hat.

"You have my address," he said coldly. "If you want help, it is yours, but you must ask for it. I shall not go down on my knees to beg you to allow me to befriend you."

Down the face, which she kept turned from him, the tears were trickling. He walked to the door, and

the same apathy which seemed to have palsied her tongue spread to her limbs. She could not move, lest the devils within might rend her more cruelly. When the door banged behind him, she called out faintly "Max." But only the sound of his steps on the stairs came to her ears.

The painter returned to Soham Flats with a sore heart and bedraggled vanity. To distract his thoughts, he determined to make a pilgrimage to the pleasant places of his youth, the villages and hamlets around Paris. A few pounds suffice for such a holiday, and when he asked his employers for leave of absence, the head of the firm, himself about to take wings for the breezy moors of Yorkshire, said with a pleasant smile: "You have worked too hard, Orpin. You deserve a month's rest. And," he opened his cheque-book, "you must accept this. It is better to give it now than at Christmas."

He handed Max a cheque for fifty pounds.

"Thank you," said Max; then he added abruptly: "Money seems to be coming my way. If this is a retaining fee, perhaps I ought to tell you that before Christmas I may be a rich man."

"In that case you can return it, my dear fellow. Good luck to you!"

So Max travelled to Fontainebleau, taking with him a landscape painter's *paraphernalia*, and little else. In the cool, leafy glades of the forest a certain peace came to him. Although he was working in different surroundings and with another medium, he found that two years of patient labour had not been wasted. One day, as he was making a study of rocks and trees, a short, thick-necked Frenchman came up and watched him. Presently, he gave a hint, so apposite that Max looked up, and recognised at once one of the shining lights of the Art world.

"*Ça y est*," said the great man. "*Vous arriverez, mon ami.*"

Max flushed like a boy, as the master pointed out certain technical defects.

"You have forgotten me," he said confusedly. "I once worked under you at Julian's. I tried and I failed." Then, moved by the other's sympathetic face, he plunged into a recital of his work in London—painting chocolate-boxes, sign-posts, theatrical scenery, and, lastly, ceilings. The Frenchman nodded and smiled.

"I remember you now," he said. "You had talent; yes—but not application. Genius? *Pouf-f-f!* The genius, my friend, is the man in the parable who turned his one talent into ten. Your *perfide Albion* has given you just what you needed—manual dexterity. How old are you? Eh? Only thirty! *Nom d'un petit bonhomme!* Come and see me in Paris."

He shook Max's hand and departed singing a *chanson d'atelier*, which echoed long in the young man's ears. Was it possible that he had learned in London, during those dreary hours of toil, what he had failed to learn in Paris? Application! Yes. But would he have so applied himself without Pretty? Was not she entitled to the credit? Had she not spurred him to his daily toil, till it became a habit, almost a necessity? Yes, yes; without her, he would have gone back, like a dog, to his vomit.

He called upon the master before he returned to England, and showed him the sketches he had made. At some the great man frowned; at others he smiled; but there were more smiles than frowns.

"You have feeling," he said at length, "and power; and you can use your brush. *Enfin*—you may go far, because your colour is excellent, and you can put into your work a quality which everybody admires and respects—*heart*. You have suffered, *mon pauvre garçon? Hein?*" Then, as Max remained silent, he continued more quickly: "Art is kind to those who suffer and are strong; for the weak, *mon brave*, she is pitiless. I do not say, look you, that you can paint a great picture. I do not know. But you ought to try—with all your heart and soul. *Tiens!* What is this?"

At the back of the portfolio was a sketch of Pretty:

one of the many which Max had made. The master stared at it, mumbling to himself. Max stared also, sensible that the head was finely drawn.

"What a type," said the other, becoming articulate. "This is a portrait. Ah yes; one never mistakes. You knew this woman well, my friend. You have drawn her character. She is of the people? *Hein?* Just so; so am I. What force! What fortitude! *Dieu et Dieu!* You English, confound you, conquer others, because you learn to conquer yourselves. Eh? You are American? It is the same thing—or nearly so. But she is English. A fine woman! *Superbe! Ravissante!*"

The French adjectives rolled out generously and sonorously. And even as Max had clearly seen the blemishes in his work when they were pointed out by the master, so now the beauty of this woman's face and soul became, under the same inspiring voice, a revelation.

"She is your wife?"

The sharp question roused him.

"No—no," he stammered. "I knew her well—once."

"*Pardon!* I understand. She is dead?"

"She is dead to me," said Max.

CHAPTER XXIV

BY THE SILVERY ITCHEN

BRIDGET went down to Quest at the beginning of September. Lavinia Bidgood, her husband, her children, and the Mapertons greeted her cordially on arrival. Daphne said with a smile, "I knew you wouldn't care to meet poor Birdie, so I thought I might as well have a family party, and get it over. The men will shoot all day, and go to sleep after dinner, so, thank goodness! we won't have to entertain them. Lavinia and Elizabeth will argue, and I shall have you to myself. It does seem hard that you should *never* be with me. I'm sure it's not been *my* fault."

Bridget smiled. She had never seen Daphne looking so radiant, with such an air of conscious virtue.

"How well country life agrees with you," she exclaimed.

"You mean how well I agree with country life."

"Then you are not really happy—here?"

"Happy? I'm bored to death. But I suppose I should make a pretty visiting face, if I were mounting the scaffold, particularly if the hangman was a handsome man."

"Have you seen Pretty Parslow?" said Bridget.

Daphne frowned. "No, I've not," she answered tartly. "It was a great mistake her coming here—a scandal, in fact. She calls herself *Miss* Parslow. I can't understand why you and Arthur wished it. You ought to have thought of me. I do not like disreputable women. I told Birdie about this girl, and she

agreed with me entirely. At her own place she is most particular."

"She doesn't often go there, does she?" Bridget could not help saying. Birdie Hope insisting upon virtue and descanting thereon tickled her humour.

"Don't be nasty on such a heavenly day as this," said Daphne lightly.

That evening the Dowager dined at Quest. The Dower House is situated at the south end of the village street, enclosed in a large and pretty garden, whose wall faces the cottage which had been assigned to Mrs. Parslow and her daughter.

During dinner Lavinia Bidgood asked some questions about Bridget's work in Poplar. Since the dreadful accident to her girl, the Priestess of the New Gnosticism had not been seen at the Renaissance Club, and had not sent a single paper to *The Gnostic*, to which, heretofore, she had been a regular contributor. Her sister Elizabeth said that poor Lavinia having exhausted what was new had begun to turn her attention to what was true. She had not lost, at any rate, her gift of stimulating talk in others, and Bridget was beguiled into giving a vivid account of the misery endured by the very poor during seasons of extreme heat or cold. When she had finished, the Dowager shook her head solemnly.

"I cannot believe, my dear, that conditions are as bad as you say."

"But I can take you with——"

"Heaven forbid! I have made a rule not to go into such dreadful places. I wonder what some people are made of?" she sighed sweetly, sensible that she herself was fashioned out of the choicest clay—in the image of her Creator.

"May I send you some pamphlets, dear lady?" said Maperton, a smile hovering around his cleanly-shaven lips.

"I never read horrors, Maperton. It is against my principles. I don't wish my mind to be—er—tainted."

"That is exactly how I feel," said Daphne.

After dinner the Dowager took Bridget aside, and spoke of Pretty in her velvety manner, which always suggested claws. Bridget never liked the old lady so well as when she was talking about the village. In Hampshire it is generally admitted to be a model village. No dissenters are suffered to dwell therein ; no noisy demagogues disturb the peace ; there are only two taverns, conducted by respectable, church-going publicans ; all the children salute the gentlepeople—the little girls curtseying demurely, the little boys touching their caps. Young women born in Quest are sought as servants, because they wear no fringes, and carry their characters on their honest rosy faces. The Dowager, however, had not laboured alone in this pleasant vineyard. The village had been blessed in the past and present by two rectors, whose ability as men of intellect would have counted for little in the development of Quest had it not been fortified by a daily life of self-sacrifice, humility, and sympathy with others, which was as a beacon to all, gentle and simple alike, who were illumined by its beams.

Into this village, with its inflexible moral law, its traditions of God-fearing respectability, its too censorious standard of right and wrong, came Pretty Parslow, her baby, and her mother.

"She has set the place by the ears," said Lady Quest. "Surely, surely, she might have called herself Mrs. Something-or-other."

"She is too honest," said Bridget.

"She could have worn a wedding-ring and said nothing. The mother seems a worthy soul, genuinely anxious to repent."

Then, as Bridget indiscreetly smiled, the Dowager laid a soft white hand upon her arm. "I fear, my dear," she cooed, "that you do not realise what you and Arthur have done."

"Perhaps not," said Bridget thoughtfully ; "but I wish I were as good a woman as Pretty Parslow."

Lady Quest's delicately-curved eyebrows almost retreated into her silvery curls.

"Good? I read the Bible to her mother. The girl refuses to listen. She is a hardened sinner, and a—minx! *Good*, indeed!"

She moved away, her rustling skirts emphasising a protest; and presently Bridget saw her deep in talk with her elder daughter. From the portentous glances thrown in her direction she could not doubt that she was the subject of the conversation. Presently Lord Maperton sat down beside her and began stroking his chin; a gesture familiar to Bridget, as indicating a certain degree of mental perplexity on the part of her distinguished friend.

"A little bird whispered to me yesterday that Master Arthur went to the Cape with the Order of the Bath in his pocket."

"Do you think I should like to be 'my lady'?" replied Bridget. "Try another lure."

"You are a shy fish," he laughed; "but you rise to the fly, even if you won't take it. Confess that you were delighted with your man's mission."

"Perhaps I would sooner have my man than his mission."

"He will return to your arms covered with glory. I predict you will be dazzled."

"I like light, but I love warmth," said Bridget.

"I should be proud to be the source of both tc you," he murmured gallantly. "Come now, let us be frank. Arthur puzzles me. He is cursed with a temperament. And he is much too modest. I have it on good authority, the highest in fact, that he refused, *refused* this mission at first. Of course you made him accept."

"You leap gaily to your conclusions."

"I flatter myself I know something of your sex."

He was so sure that he had read Bridget's ambitions that he continued glibly: "We must brush the cobwebs out of that dear fellow's brain. He mustn't confound means with ends."

He paused, eyeing Bridget sharply, beneath his grizzled brows. Her face was inscrutable; yet he

fancied that he detected a gratified smile lurking about the corners of her mouth.

"I shall not disguise from you," he continued quickly, "that my work in regard to the better housing of the poor has been the bricks and mortar of a house quite other than the Maperton Buildings, for instance. A public man to-day must have one subject which he knows thoroughly; a subject, no matter what it may be, which makes him indispensable to his party. Arthur, despite his talents, would have failed to make his mark in the House if he had not been able to pick holes in the arguments of the Opposition whenever they touched upon the congested districts and kindred topics; and the House was quick to perceive and appreciate his qualities as a debater; but had he stuck to that one question—as he was inclined to do, dear lady, if it had not been for you and me—there is no doubt he would have been in time voted a bore; and bores, I need not tell you, generally remain at the bottom of the ladder."

He moved closer to her, as if implying that a partnership existed between them.

"You," he continued, in his mellifluous tones, "persuaded Arthur to enter Parliament; you girded on his sword, like the good wife you are; now, unless you want to see him come home on his shield, you must keep his weapons sharp for him. You take me?"

"Oh yes," sighed Bridget; and the statesman nodded, chuckled, and began to talk about the session just over. Bridget lent him, it is to be feared, but an indifferent ear. She was thinking of this ever-increasing prosperity which was digging a gulf between herself and the man she loved. She could read so plainly on the faces of her sister and the members of the family an enhanced respect and consideration for the wife of the man who had gone to South Africa with the Order of the Bath in his pocket. And she realised that these people rejoiced, because they would reflect his honours and share them; that worth and energy and executive ability were as dross unless hall-marked by success. The next morning,

directly after breakfast, she walked down to Quest, which lies below the great house on a slope of undulating park-like land bounded by the Itchen. She passed out of what is known as the East Lodge, because she wished to walk the whole length of the village, an ever-delightful pilgrimage past fragrant gardens filled with old-fashioned flowers.

Halfway down the village is the church, the steeple towering above a lovely avenue of lindens. Beyond and above the church stands the Rectory. Bridget often wished that all rectors were lodged as the Rectors of Quest; for house and garden furnish in themselves a theme of which the world that works and suffers can never grow weary. Built of grey flint, encrusted with soft mosses and lichens, with many gables and twisted chimneys, nestling at the foot of some stately elms in which a colony of rooks has been long established, surrounded by quiet lawns and shrubberies, the Rectory seems to be the link between peace and strife. Bridget passed through the churchyard and into the Rectory garden, where the Rector was pacing slowly up and down. As he came forward to greet her, she marked a quizzical smile upon the kind face.

"You have come to make your peace with me," he said.

"I always find peace here," she answered.

"Yes," he replied, "only the echo of strife comes to this garden, but an old man may find even that unwelcome."

"You received my letter?" said Bridget. "Perhaps I should not have sent the Parslows to Quest without consulting you, but I acted for the best."

The Rector made no reply. Some said that silence was his Excalibur which smote speech upon the mouth. His most scathing rebukes were left unsaid. The village washerwoman, who washes for the quality, conveyed, perhaps, the sense of the community when she said:

"The Rector, bless him, don't say much, but he's a tarr'ble thinker. When my lady scolds I be stiff-

necked—yes I be, but when the Rector gives me one of his long, steady marrer-stirring looks, why then I do surely know that my soul is a-skew."

"I fear the experiment has failed," said Bridget.

"Poor women!" murmured the Rector.

"I am on my way to them now. You have called on them?"

"Yes. The mother, whom I did not see, received me with a hymn, the daughter with honest hostility, the baby with a howl. Ah, well, I shall call again when you have smoothed the way."

Bridget guessed that he had been rudely entreated by Pretty; and—since talking with Daphne and the Dowager—she could understand the girl's attitude towards the villagers. She felt that she could not explain, not even to this wise old man, a problem in femininity so perplexing as Pretty. She was unfeignedly sorry to have disturbed the peace which he had earned and had a right to enjoy. Accordingly, she entertained him with an account of the change in Lavinia Bidgood, whom the Rector had baptised and prepared for confirmation, whose fine qualities of heart he had always defended, and whose mental idosyncrasies he had on rare occasions vehemently deplored. When she took leave of him he was laughing heartily.

Passing once more through the churchyard, Bridget found herself again in the village street. Here the cottages were clustered more thickly together, no longer detached and surrounded by gardens, but lying side by side in an irregular line. Here, too, were such small shops as Quest boasted: a butcher's, a grocer's, the post office, and the large square, red-brick inn, with its swinging sign—the Quest Arms. Lovers of strong drink, therefore, must run the gauntlet of this part of the village on their road to the tavern; and Bridget, in fancy, could see inquisitive eyes behind the diamond-paned casements, and hear the sharp interrogation of the gossips as they pointed out those who came too often to and stayed too long at the bar of the Quest Arms. Was Mrs. Parslow amongst them?

At the end of the street she paused for a moment. The Parslows' cottage—if the directions given were correct—lay to her right. She looked up and saw a second swinging sign. She was standing almost on the threshold of the only other inn in Quest: The Horse and Bridle. The Parslows' cottage, therefore, must lie behind this. Her brows contracted. What cruel chance had placed this woman within a stone's throw of her enemy? Chance? No. Her own negligence.

The agent, however, had assuredly received instructions to give the new-comers a good cottage, for this one lay back from the road, and was surrounded by a small garden, full of hollyhocks, larkspur, and calceolarias, blazing still, although August was past. In the middle of the garden, hanging some linen upon a line, stood Pretty. She greeted Bridget with a curious mixture of timidity and defiance; and her face, although of a browner and rosier complexion, seemed to have hardened.

"I have come for a good long talk," said Bridget; "but I'll wait till you have hung up your linen. You have some pretty things there."

"Yes; mother's got all the work we can do—if she can keep it. They don't know anything about washing down here. But it's made the other woman jealous. And her tongue wags all the time. Well, I don't care. I hate the place, but it suits Nancy. You should see her. She's getting fat!"

"I should like to see her at once," said Bridget.

So the baby was brought out. A month's pure air had transformed the tiny creature. Her eyes were lustrous; her skin pink, and beginning to dimple; her shrunken limbs had filled out, showing delightful creases at the wrists and ankles. As Pretty threw her into the air she crowed with ecstasy.

"If her father could see her now," exclaimed Bridget.

Pretty put the child down upon a small square of turf. "He did come to see me," she said, in a hard voice; "and he went away without even looking at her. He don't care for either of us."

"That is why you gave up using his name."

"Yes!" said the girl fiercely. "He came to offer me money—*money!*—and I refused it. And then he got mad, and said that if ever I wanted help from him I must ask for it. I'll never ask—never! And I won't use his name. And I don't want to hear it."

"And your mother, Pretty?"

The girl glanced round furtively, as if prying eyes were often to be seen; then she spoke vehemently. "I must tell you—I must—I *must*. No one else, but just you, because you can understand. If it hadn't been for mother I might have kept *him*. You know that. And here—where I haven't a friend except you—I might have been happy with Nancy, if it was not for her. She's soaking all the time, and the neighbours," she laughed bitterly, "think it's me. And I let 'em think it—the fools! Mother buys brandy and gin, and tells 'em it's for me. Oh, she's a rare old 'ypocrite, she is. She sings her 'ymns," as the speaker warmed to her theme, she resumed her old dialect of the slums. "Yes, she sings her 'ymns, goes to church, mykes a doleful fyce, and says 'er eyes are red with cryin' for me, the miserable sinner; and I let 'er do it. Why? Because it mykes me laugh. Rare gymes she 'as with the curick, too. Yus; it's—it's a circus to me. Maybe they've told you some stories about my impudence. I've slammed the door in the fyce of 'arf the old cats in the village, because I dassn't let 'em in—for mother was lyin' there drunk. Once a week my lady comes to read the Bible to 'er, and I do manage to get 'er sober for that, but I can't stop and listen, too, because I'd kill myself laughing. See?"

"Yes; I see," said Bridget.

"Queer—ain't it?" continued the girl, with a sob in her throat. "I'd ought to have chucked 'er, but I can't. Sometimes I feel when I'm 'uggin' little Nancy that if I went the same wy I'd like 'er to stick to me."

"I hope Nancy will always stick to you," said Bridget. "But I think, for her sake and for your sake, the truth ought to be told. Let me tell it, Pretty."

"No, no. It's my secret. I let it out because I didn't want yer to think me worse than I am. And, and, this is funny, too, we're mykin' a good livin', because the gentry are so sorry for mother. That's a fact. They send 'er their nice things, which I wash, partly, o' course, because they're well got up, but partly because she's a respectable woman cursed—that was the doctor's word, cursed with a shymeless daughter. Tell the truth—why, we'd lose our business. Oh, it's a rare gyme!"

She laughed again, but her eyes were wet. Fidelity, fortitude—the qualities which Bridget most admired—shone conspicuous upon her face. Some such expression Max had caught and transferred to his sketching-block; the expression which provoked the homage of the famous French painter, the expression which, in its divinest form, is God's promise and seal that good shall triumph over evil.

"Pretty," said Bridget hurriedly, "don't laugh! It hurts me, and it hurts you, hardens you. That is what I am afraid of. And thank you for telling me the truth. You have taught me a lesson. And you will teach this village a lesson. Sooner or later the truth will come out. Screen your poor mother in the way that seems best to you, but—*slam no doors!* Do you understand?"

"All right," said Pretty more quietly, regaining her composure and her aitches. "And, Mrs. Wyndquest, don't think I'm complaining! I've had two years of good times, haven't I? How many women can say as much? And I've learned a lot too. I am grateful for that, I am indeed."

"There is one man here who can help you, and who will never betray you—the Rector. Let me tell him all your story, of which he knows only a part. Let me do it as much for your mother's sake as for yours. I cannot tell you what he will say, but he will say nothing to offend. You treated him rudely; on my account you owe him an apology, for he is my friend, and I wrote and asked him to call on you."

Pretty shook her head obstinately. But Bridget's

arguments prevailed. The Rector—and he alone—might be told the facts.

Presently they parted. Bridget did not return to Quest, but strolled into the Chase, wishing to adjust her relations with this daughter of Holborn, whom she had helped, and who now, in turn, was helping her. She had made up her mind to leave Quest at the end of the week. Daphne had drifted so far from her, it was so obvious that she did not need her, that she (Bridget) was regarded as one of the family—to be entertained and got rid of civilly. And there was Maperton. His bland, dulcet tones, like the voice of an Æolian harp, seemed to echo the roar of the gale which drove her husband and his fortunes farther and farther from herself and home. And his wife—a good woman, but so intensely narrow, so "cribbed, cabined, and confined" by evangelical ideas, a porcupine in petticoats, shooting her quills into every one who touched her. Even Lavinia, whom she really loved, had proved uncongenial company of late. The poor lady, distraught by her emotions, almost hysterical, insisted upon long and futile arguments, during which she abandoned her premisses, seeking refuge in those of her opponent, claiming them loudly as her own. But now, fired by Pretty's example, Bridget determined to stay.

By the time she had reached this conclusion, she had walked some distance into a part of the Chase where there were no roads, but only a bridle-path leading to the ruins of Quest Castle. Bridget sat down upon a moss-covered stone, and gazed across the landscape, thinking of the day when she and Arthur had walked to the Castle, and of her determination to tell him the truth. Had she not faltered, would her life and other lives have been ordered otherwise? She could not doubt it.

Thus musing, she marked a tall figure ascending the slope opposite to her. There was something in the carriage of the body and the poise of the head which seemed familiar. She looked again, more carefully, having very clear and long sight. Then she let fall an exclamation. The man was Paul Festus.

CHAPTER XXV

"WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF WORDS SHALL NOT PROSPER"

DURING the ten days when the apostle of sinlessness lay at his lodging he found time, despite editorial duties (which were not heavy), to reflect upon the future, represented by Matilda Bosman and the *maisonette* in Lower Belgrave Street. He wrote the spinster a charming letter, telling her, in sparkling prose, that he had sustained certain injuries which would keep him a prisoner in his bedroom, injuries received by him in an accident, which he vividly described—an attempt, on his part, to stop a runaway horse ridden by a terrified woman. Unfortunately for the sinless one, Miss Bosman had received by a previous post a matter-of-fact note from Quest, who felt it his duty to inform his dear Miss Bosman that he had taken upon himself the punishment of a scoundrel and an impostor, that he begged to enclose the knave's record, and, lastly, that he ventured to hope Miss Bosman would see the propriety, as he did, of keeping her counsel in regard to a most unfortunate affair. This note the spinster answered at once, assuring the peer that her lips were "sealed" (the dear lady loved such phrases). Her reply, however, to the apostle's letter was somewhat delayed, for the spinster craved the sweets of revenge, and for the moment was not quite sure where she could obtain such confectionery. Her mind was made up on one point—a man had grossly and cruelly fooled her; she owed it to herself and her sex to fool him. Finally she wrote an affectionate billet, saying that she hoped to see him in Lower Belgrave Street as soon as possible

and, at the same time, she instructed her man-servant to call daily at the doctor's lodgings to inquire, with her compliments, how he did.

When his mirror assured him that he could venture abroad without attracting notice other than that to which a man of striking personality is entitled, he wrote again to the spinster, asking if it would suit her arrangements to give him a cutlet and a glass of wine upon the following day at half-past one. Miss Bosman possessed an excellent white Burgundy, and the doctor may have reflected that he needed some such stimulant. The lady, however, pleaded a long-standing engagement, and begged her Paul to call at four, when she would give instructions that they should not be disturbed. At four, accordingly, the would-be Benedict presented himself. He felt that he was about to make honourable amends to his Matilda; and the consciousness of the pleasure he could bestow upon a deserving woman suffused his handsome eyes with what Miss Bosman had often described as a "lambent glow." To his surprise (and, shall it be added, to his relief?) the spinster received him somewhat formally. Then she motioned him to a chair facing the light, sat down herself in the shadow, and entreated him to give a circumstantial account of his dreadful accident. The doctor, nothing loath, embarked upon a narrative nicely calculated to stir to its depths a sensitive soul, and the fact that Miss Bosman was constrained more than once to hide her face in a delicate cambric handkerchief did not impede his progress. When he had finished, the spinster appeared to be sobbing convulsively.

"Matilda," said the apostle, in his sugary tones, "be calm; your Paul is here."

The spinster dabbed at eyes inflamed by emotion, and tried vainly to compose her quivering mouth.

"Sit still," she commanded feebly. "I beg you to sit still"—the doctor was warming to his work; "I shall feel better presently."

"Take your time, my dear Matilda, take your time. Such feeling is a credit to you and a compliment to me."

At these words such a fit of sobbing overcame the spinster that her lover became alarmed.

"This," said he, with dignity, "is hysteria. Try and control yourself, dearest. I *must* protest."

The lady obeyed, sighing.

"You say," she stammered, "that the b-b-brute struck you on the face?"

"Violently," murmured the apostle, laying a long, carefully-manicured forefinger upon the bridge of his nose.

"He d-d-did not k-k-kick you?" she continued.

"He did not. Ah, well, a lady's life was at stake, Matilda."

"Did you think of me," she asked timidly, "when you were being battered and c-c-crushed?"

"Even then, dear one, when I realised that my tenure of life was of the frailest, my thoughts turned to you."

"What a wonderful man you are!"

The apostle assumed an expression which he reserved for such occasions only. He had reason to know that with adoring women it was supremely effective. And now, as heretofore, he had the pleasure of beholding Miss Bosman bury her face in her handkerchief.

"And now, my own, having been miraculously—I say it with all reverence—miraculously restored to you and to—er—others to whom I venture to hope I have been a source of inspiration and—er—affection, may I suggest that we could not show our gratitude to Heaven more becomingly than by joining together lives which Heaven has plainly signified should no longer remain asunder. I speak, Matilda, of marriage."

"I am not young," faltered the spinster.

"You are—mature," said Festus. "I have no taste, Matilda, for unripe fruit."

"I was never beautiful," murmured the lady.

"There is nothing so beautiful as purity, modesty, and grace. Your charms, dearest, may be hidden, 'as the music of the moon sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale'; but they have been revealed to—me. To me you are, you always will be—beautiful."

Festus, from long habit acquired on public platforms, always looked upward when quoting poetry. As he murmured Tennyson's delightful lines his eyes were fixed upon the cornice of the ceiling: otherwise he might have marked a malicious sparkle in the eyes of his Matilda. She had not, perhaps, fully appreciated the allusion to eggs.

"But I am," murmured the lady, "for a person in my rank of life—rich. I am richer than you suppose. We all have our failings. One of mine has been a sustained effort to save—to put by. There was no particular reason why I should change my manner of life. This house, these rooms, these simple furnishings were good enough for my dear parents; they have been good enough for me."

She paused, and the apostle nodded gravely. The rooms, he was reflecting, were quite good enough for him.

"I inherited from my beloved father a fortune of £75,000"—unconsciously the apostle's long fingers closed upon this vast sum—"and by judicious investments and the savings of fifteen years my capital has doubled itself."

The doctor rose to his full height, and to the dramatic exigency of the moment.

"Matilda," he said, "spare me these details. They," he coughed nervously, "they distress me. My chalice, as I said to you once before, is not of gold. I have not laid up gold." The speaker's voice trembled; at that moment a letter from his banker's lay in his pocket, wherein he was advised that his account had been overdrawn. "But, Matilda, I do not scorn gold, although I hold it as dross compared with a virtuous woman, or a noble man. I shall not allow your gold to come between you and me."

He advanced with open arms. What a stimulant is gold! Better even than Chablis from a prince's cellars, or the Kronn Tokayer of an Emperor! The apostle was about to enfold in his long wiry arms one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. And he had supposed that his

Matilda had less than one-third that magnificent sum! He had imperilled this great fortune by foolish philandering with another woman! The cold dew of terror glistened upon his white forehead (of that forehead Matilda Bosman had written in her diary: "It is of alabaster splendour, illumined by the wisdom of centuries"); his knees became as wax; he looked inspired with a great passion. Poor Miss Bosman had dreamed of such a love, had prayed for such a lover. Now he was here—at her feet. She rose up too, her kindly face trembling with excitement.

"Stand back!" she cried; "I have something to say. You come to me with empty hands—are they clean?"

The question so upset the sinless one, that he actually interpreted the sentence literally, glancing with anxiety at his shining nails and immaculate skin.

"Are they clean?" she repeated, less loudly. "Is there anything beside gold which might stand between us? Sin, for instance, or crime? Answer me."

"There is nothing," said the apostle, cringing. He was so totally unprepared that—as he said afterwards, in the pregnant slang of his country—he gave himself dead away. He could read, this reader of faces, the scorn, the bitterness, and the hatred which sparkled in the faded eyes of the woman who had once loved him. "There is n-n-nothing," he stammered for the second time; "my hands are clean."

He turned them palm upwards like a schoolboy; and then Miss Bosman began to laugh. "Clean?" she echoed. "Look at this!" She thrust into the hands that were clean the certified record which had come from the private enquiry office. The apostle glanced at the paper, and had the grace to blush.

"Lord Quest thrashed you," she said slowly, the fire dying in her eyes, "because you tried to blackmail his wife. I," her voice sounded very forlorn, "have no strong man to protect me; so I have avenged myself." She spoke so feebly that it was amazing to think she had been able to play her part. "We are quits, sir.

You fooled a silly woman, but you will never forget, I am sure, that a silly woman fooled you!"

Festus returned to his lodgings, feeling as sore in mind as some ten days before he had been sore in body, and it took him quite as long to recover. To his credit be it said that he bore the plucky little spinster no malice. He told himself that he had played his game badly, like an amateur, and that he deserved to lose. None the less his grievance against Quest increased daily. Quest had really "knocked him out," not Miss Bosman, and as a native son of a Republic known as the land of the free and the home of the brave, it was his bounden duty to "get even" as soon as possible. When alone with his thoughts Festus habitually used the slang of the West.

Quest, however, had gone to California, and his wife was in Hampshire. Whenever the apostle allowed his mind to stray into the country in search of the fascinating viscountess he was sensible that an effort was required to recapture it. It ran away, so to speak, at the sight of her tempestuous petticoat.

Although he had been fooled by Matilda Bosman, he was certain that he had made no mistake in regard to Daphne. Accordingly he wrote the lady two letters, one of which is given, not as a model of epistolary style, but because it shows Festus in his true light—the man, not the ape.

"Ma belle dame,—Quest knocked me out. He is ten years younger than I, and a heavier man; otherwise it might have been my fight. Matilda is mine no longer; Quest told her everything. It is hard luck, because she has one hundred and fifty thousand pounds, which would have gilded even Barabbas, let alone a poor devil who has always worked hard for his living! I suppose you will refuse me the glad hand, although I should like to tell you about my love passages with the Bosman. You would think the story distinctly humorous. Quest, of course, has left behind his orders. You are locked up, I understand, in a fortress; no stranger is to be allowed within your gates till your lord and master returns. How you must curse me! And yet, believe it

or not, as you will, the memory of the hours I have spent with you wipes out the blows and insults I received from Quest, and the loss of a fortune. A queer confession for a *chevalier d'industrie* to make—isn't it? I am thinking of Africa as a new field for my pen—not my sword. There's going to be a big row; and I shall take the Boer side, in England! With pamphlets and speeches I ought to be able to keep the pot and the British public boiling. The sentimentalists are my puppets; and they pay handsomely the man who can pipe to their dancing. You know how I value your opinion. Pray tell me what you think of this scheme."

Daphne answered this letter, because she was afraid of Festus, yet fascinated by him. The fact, too, that she was disobeying her husband (in spirit if not in letter) gave a thrill of malicious pleasure. Then the apostle wrote again more ardently; and she replied at length, bewailing her dull lot, prattling like a child robbed of its toys, of Ostend, Homburg, and Dinard.

Festus chuckled when he received the second letter. He had turned *The Gnostic* into a pro-Boer organ; he was hand in glove with the Little Englanders; he had started a fund for the dissemination of pamphlets: an excellent month's work. None the less, he imperilled the success of his enterprise by leaving London for Winchester. He was not only yearning to hold Daphne's soft white hand in his, but he wanted to look at it—palm upwards. Max's words, "a line of heart queerly divided in the middle," stuck in his memory.

Daphne consented to meet him!

She told herself she was sorry for him, the under dog in a plucky fight. The reader can supply a better reason; a dram-drinker's craving for a stimulant. What gin was to Mrs. Parslow excitement had become to Daphne.

Festus behaved discreetly at their first interview in the ruins of Quest Castle. He told her some capital stories, and made light of his own misadventures. To an American woman his powers of recuperation were admirable—and he had such a fine head. The mere thought of Quest's iconoclastic fist descending upon it

gave her a shudder. Festus then spoke of his work, asking for advice, and receiving plenty of it out of the inexhaustible stores of Daphne's vanity. Together they played at marionettes with some of the most grave and learned signors in England. To be able to "pull the leg" (I quote the apostle) of philosophers, statesmen, and bookmen—the shining lights of the pro-Boer party—seemed to Daphne a delightful pastime. Like poor Miss Bosman, she told her companion that he was a wonderful man, but he did not assume the expression which had wrought such havoc with his female adorers. On the contrary, he laughed frankly, and said that it warmed the very cockles of his heart to be able to talk unconstrainedly with his only friend.

At parting she gave him her hand, which he held for a longer time than was necessary, his eyes on hers, his smile reflected upon her face.

"Do you believe in palmistry?" he asked abruptly.

"Do you?" she returned hurriedly, thinking at once of Max.

"I practised the art for a living, and made a very fair income. Let me read your hand." Beneath his masterful gaze Daphne slowly turned up her palm. Like most weak people, she was at heart superstitious; and she gave Festus credit for certain psychic powers, which indeed he possessed. "I have been," he continued, "Theosophist, Spiritualist, Christian Scientist, and Astrologer. In the study and practice of occultism, I found *something* which I could not account for—the leaven of the mystical which appeals so strongly to certain men and to nearly all women."

As he spoke he dropped his light tone, and assumed the grave and impressive voice of the prophet. He knew well what effect it would have on Daphne.

"In this hand," he continued, "I can read the past and the present; the future is obscure."

"In a word, you can tell me nothing which I do not know already."

Daphne eyed him sharply. It was she who had entreated her husband to seek out Max and to bind

him to secrecy. Quest had read the hastily-scrawled lines and had been affected by the tell-tale splash of a tear upon the paper. After his interview with the young man he wrote curtly to his wife, saying that her secret was safe and had certainly not been revealed to Festus.

"Nothing," he replied absently.

"How stupid," she exclaimed flippantly. Then his absorbed glance pricking her curiosity, she added quickly, "Give me a sample of your powers."

"I will say this much," he murmured, "the secret of your hand will be safe with me, because I am your friend. As a man who is compelled to live by his wits, I might be tempted to turn it to account. I could sell it, for instance, to a certain editor I know for a good round sum, but I shall hold it in my hand as—as," he looked at her hand, which was tightly clinched, "as you hold it in yours."

She was now frightened.

"W-w-w-what do you mean?"

"You are Daphne, not Bridget."

"Max told you?"

"No. Your hand."

"Well?" she panted.

"It *is* well; don't be alarmed. Do you think I would betray you? But why did you do it?"

She told her story, glossing the facts, so that more than once Festus smiled. Then he took his leave.

"Will you meet me here to-morrow?"

"N-n-not to-morrow."

"The next day?"

"Perhaps," she smiled coquettishly. Festus looked grave.

"That is hardly fair to me, *Daphne*, is it?"

"The day after to-morrow, then; same time and place?"

Festus lifted his hat and departed. Daphne watched him till he was out of sight. "He's an interesting man," she sighed, "but I mustn't compromise myself. He really cares! And I," she laughed—"oh, well; a woman, a deserted wife, must amuse herself."

CHAPTER XXVI

A LETTER FROM OVERSEAS

BRIDGET recognised Festus with an emotion impossible to describe. She was woman of the world enough to know that he had not come to the ruins to admire the view, or to inhale the sweet September breezes. She had always detested the apostle, who had inspired in her from the first one of those singular repulsions to which, perhaps, women are more subject than men. Napoleon, as Chips had called him, represented all that she loathed in modern life—the glib talker, the sensualist, the false prophet, the blackmailer, tolerated, and even courted, because he was clever and handsome. It seemed incredible that her sister should have permitted herself to fall again into his leprous clutch. "He is unclean, unclean," she cried. She crouched down amongst the bracken, and watched him. Presently she saw Daphne and her dog, who ran forward to welcome Festus. "This is not the first time they have met," thought Bridget, knowing that it was the pug's endearing habit to bite his mistress's mere acquaintance. Then Festus and the lady disappeared into the ruins; and Bridget, after waiting half an hour in vain, walked home, distraught with shame, and that sense of impotence which is so demoralising when we see a catastrophe impending, and are unable to avert it. At luncheon Daphne appeared smiling as usual, and confessed to an appetite. The Japanese pug munched his chocolates from Paris. Bridget thought the meal would never come to an end. After luncheon, followed the hour of coffee and liqueurs and cigarettes in the

quadrangle, now full of exotic plants: huge ferns in tubs, immense palms, and flowering shrubs of all kinds —a wealth of tropical vegetation absolutely out of place in the Tudor courtyard, and till Daphne's advent never seen there.

Finally, Lady Maperton and Lavinia Bidgood went indoors to write letters, and Daphne turned with the sweetest smile to her twin:

"Now, darling, we shall be really comfy; those women get on my nerves; they are—how shall I put it?—so very—you know—marmalady; after arguing with them I always feel as if my mind was sticky."

"Your mind needs scraping," said Bridget.

"Eh? What have I done *now?*"

This plaintive appeal exasperated the sister.

"I saw you with Dr. Festus this morning."

"And why not?" her face hardened into an obstinate smile; "why not, pray? Do you think I am going to chuck my pals to oblige you and Quest? Oh, what a hateful world this is when a woman can't meet a friend without her own sister misconstruing her motives."

"I do not misconstrue your motives," replied Bridget. "I know that you are playing with this man, that you value too highly your position to make any sacrifices for his sake or for any one else. Your motives! Good Heavens! Have you ever had any motive except that of amusing yourself, of exciting yourself? If you were capable of throwing everything you hold dear to the four winds for true love of even such a man as Festus, I could sympathise with you, but at heart you are as cold as a diamond. To your heart I do not appeal. I appeal to your head. Are you crack-brained that you do not see a danger signal when it is blazing before your eyes? Festus is a blackguard; and his one redeeming trait seems to be the fact that he has fallen in love with you. And knowing this, you meet him, here, after all that has passed—because he *amuses* you!"

While she was speaking, Daphne lit another cigarette, and was now lying back in her *chaise longue* blowing circles of smoke. Bridget was sensible that she had

spoken harshly, assuming the tone which ever hardens rather than softens. How differently, she reflected, the Rector of Quest would have applied himself to such a task.

"You are my guest," said Daphne.

"Forgive me," cried the other. "You are my own flesh and blood. If evil touches you, it touches me too. I ought to have measured my words, but who does, who can, when great issues are at stake?"

"Great issues!"

"The honour of this house."

"Which our dollars restored—don't forget that. You think that I am robbing Peter" (Peter was one of Quest's many Christian names) "to pay Paul," she laughed flippantly, "but I propose to check my accounts without assistance from you. Because you are my sister, I will tell you, that Festus has come to me for help, not for money, for advice," she flushed slightly, as Bridget smiled; "he thinks, as all Americans should think, that this plucky little Republic should not be imposed on by a great Empire. He wants to use my name."

"You are going to let him use it?"

"Certainly."

"Quest will be furious."

"I hope so. He has treated me shamefully." Then she added quickly: "The old cat lent her name to people who sold patent medicines, and tooth-powders. I choose to lend mine to the cause of liberty and justice."

Next day Daphne told her that the apostle had returned to town. She kissed Bridget very prettily, and said that she (Daphne) had been in the wrong; and indeed, her extraordinary desire to be thought well of by the people with whom she happened to be living constrained her to a series of "small, sweet courtesies" which, to Bridget, were as manna falling in the wilderness. As a matter of fact, Festus had several public engagements which he dared not neglect; and the people of Quest had the pleasure of seeing his name in the paper nearly every morning as speaking here and there upon the one absorbing topic of the hour. He

had identified himself with so many men of standing that the British Public (who always judges a man by the company he keeps) began to regard him very seriously indeed; while his now famous pamphlet, treating the Transvaal from an idealistic and imaginative point of view, had an enormous sale. "I thought I was drowned," he wrote to Daphne; "and lo! I am once more on the crest of the wave, swimming strongly."

Lord Maperton also was summoned to town; but before he left Quest he took Bridget aside, and, swearing her to secrecy, imparted a piece of private information: "War is held to be inevitable. Arthur has justified his speeches, and his future is assured. His despatches to the Government are much spoken of. We must look higher than the Bath, my dear. With *us* behind him, he will go far." Bridget returned the warm pressure of his hand, but her heart relaxed. "Yes," she thought, "he will go far—from me." For a season she was very unhappy believing herself to be selfish—a disloyal wife. Most women, she knew, would rejoice, whereas she mourned. In her distress she confided her troubles to the Rector of Quest—an ardent patriot, and yet a man of heart, purged from sentimentality. She put the case against herself, but he understood, and gave her comfort.

"I measure these things in their relation to God," he said simply. "Although by birth you are not an Englishwoman, yet you are too true a wife not to wish your husband to serve his country, even if it parts him from you; but if you feel that he could be serving his country and his God to better advantage elsewhere than in the House of Commons, you are right, nay, it is your duty, to urge him to leave it, and to hope and to pray that he will. For my part, having known Arthur ever since he was a boy at Harrow, I can say honestly that I believe him to be unfitted for political life, although that life may hold for him honours and emoluments. Since he entered Parliament I have marked a change in him. The unrest, the fret and fever of the struggle, the anxieties and disappointments will undo him. But, you

will pardon me, I always supposed that you were the lever which lifted him from Stepney and dropped him at Westminster. He told me as much the last time I saw him."

"I have twisted my life and his," she replied

"I have seen Pretty Parslow," he continued. "I daresay she has told you that we are friends. Poor child! She has been hardly tried."

The Rector was summoned by a parishioner, and Bridget went away. She saw Pretty nearly every day, much to the annoyance of the Dowager, who admitted, however, that Miss Parslow's manners had improved, and that the expression of her face was less hard. None the less, the prejudice against the girl waxed stronger in the minds of the villagers. More than once she had been provoked by gibing tongues into furious outbursts of anger or (what made a deeper impression) sarcasm.

Toward the end of September a long letter came from Quest.

"By great good fortune" (he wrote) "I have stumbled upon the truth. At first Max's claims seemed incontestable. The lawyers I employed verified the copies of the documents, and nothing remained but to find out whether Godfrey Romayne had divorced his first wife, or if anything had occurred to make that first marriage null and void. Acting under my instructions, advertisements were placed in local papers all over the States, offering a handsome reward to any person or persons who could give information in regard to the first marriage. We had few replies; and these confirmed what we already knew. Expert opinion here said we had not a leg to stand on. And the fact that the twins had married Englishmen would not have strengthened our case before a Californian jury. And then, like a bolt from the blue, came the truth. After Max was sent to Godfrey Romayne the mother went to Chicago, where she practised as a medium and clairvoyante. After many adventures, she returned to San Francisco, where she died and was buried. As Madame Stella, the seventh daughter, born with a caul, she was, I fancy, as well known to the American police as Doctor Paul Festus. The facts, which must have been known to Festus, are these: She married as a girl of sixteen

a gambler who deserted her. Then she met Romayne and married him, because he was a gentleman and likely to make his mark. It appears that he did make his mark, but they lived together very unhappily. Max was born. Then she bolted with the gambler, whom she seems to have loved, taking the baby with her, because she thought Romayne would pay a large ransom for his son. Romayne, however, looked up her record, and found proof of the first marriage. The gambler answered my advertisement. More, I have the record of his marriage. Romayne took back the boy, as we know, because he had his mother's eyes; and, being an extraordinarily secretive and proud man, kept the story dark. Doubtless he would have provided for Max had he believed him to be alive. That is why Max was known at Menlo by his mother's name of Orpin, which the apostle, it appears, rejected for that of Festus. . . ."

When Bridget read this letter, she recalled several entries in her father's books, sums of money sent to Madame Stella. Falling on evil days, the woman must have applied to Romayne for help and had received it. In the postscript of the letter, Quest announced his intention of leaving San Francisco: "I am going to join old Arthur at the Cape."

"He does not mention me," said Daphne bitterly. "Why should he write to you?"

"He is very sore," replied Bridget.

"I am his wife, although, although——"

"Yes?"

"I might be excused for forgetting it. Englishmen have no hearts."

"They do not wear them on their sleeves," replied Bridget thoughtfully.

She answered Quest's letter at once, entreating him to return home to his wife and child, quoting Pretty Parslow and her loyalty to her mother. The Dowager wrote also, a ponderous epistle, for which Quest paid overweight, for his mother could never bring herself to put more than one foreign stamp upon an envelope. She dwelt at length upon details connected with the management of the estate, but towards the end of

the letter Daphne was mentioned. "Your wife," she wrote, "is pining. I suspect that some trifling quarrel has alienated you from her. Your departure was very abrupt. That is *not* my business, although I felt hurt that you did not see fit to confide in one who has a sacred right to your confidence and has ever had your welfare at heart, but it *is* my business to warn you that neither a pretty wife nor a large estate can be neglected with impunity. You have accomplished your task handsomely. Now, my dearest boy, come home."

Bridget told Max's story to Pretty, and saw a flame in her hazel eyes.

"I knew that it was money and Napoleon which took him from me," she said eagerly; "and now perhaps, perhaps——"

She did not finish the sentence, for Bridget laid her hand upon her arm.

"Don't set your heart on that," she said steadily. "I fear that he is his mother's son."

"No, no," cried the girl. "Must the child take after the mother, Mrs. Wyndquest? Doesn't the father count for anything?"

Mrs. Parslow, who had been sitting unnoticed in a corner of the room, volunteered an opinion.

"The mother most always comes out strongest in the boys. You, Ellun, are your father's child. Yus, 'e thought nothink o' throwing 'is boots at my 'ead, and you've done the syme many and many's the time."

"Oh, I took precious good care not to hit you," replied Pretty hastily.

For several days after this Pretty went about her duties whistling and singing. Bridget guessed what was in her heart and sighed.

There would seem to be nearly always a lull before the storm, a flicker from the candle about to go out, and yet, with the experience of generations before us, who is wise enough to light another candle, or to see that our sails are close-reefed? For nearly a fortnight Mrs. Parslow kept sober! She had

beer with her meals—nothing more. Who knows? Perhaps the wretched woman was making an effort greater than any she had made heretofore. Lack of the spirit to which she was accustomed made her querulous and irritable, but Pretty bore with her ill-humours, and watched her patiently. One day Pretty went to the village surgery for some medicine. As the doctor put the phial into her hand she said timidly, "Can a woman get the better of drink?" The doctor eyed her keenly. "Yes," he said slowly, "a strong young woman like you can be treated for the disease, for it is a disease, and the cure may be radical." Pretty blushed. "If I was as old as mother?" she faltered. The doctor—a hard-working man—misinterpreted the interrogation in her eyes. "In my practice in the London hospitals," he replied curtly, "I have not known one single case of a woman drunkard over fifty being reclaimed. You cannot begin too soon." Pretty thanked him, and hurried away.

None the less, she hoped against hope, buoyed up by the Rector's faith in the power of God. She began to pray, fiercely and ardently, when she was bending over the washtub and ironing-board, and when she lay awake at night. Her mother was senilely fond of little Nancy; she had often beseeched Pretty to allow her to wash and dress the little thing. This—one of the purest of a mother's pleasures—Pretty now relinquished. The old woman would take the child into the Chase, and guard it jealously, crooning to it her everlasting hymns. She confessed to the Rector that Nancy kept her from the bottle. Each day it seemed to both women that the little girl grew more bewitching in the dawn of its intelligence. "It knows," Mrs. Parslow would say, "it knows, bless it, and loves me." Mrs. Parslow had never inspired love in Pretty, and love—according to the Rector—was the only miracle-worker. Watching the growth of love in its material and spiritual presentment, Pretty imperceptibly changed her manner towards her mother. Her face hardened or her eyes twinkled if

Mrs. Parslow played the hypocrite for the benefit of the quality, but her tongue was still.

When war was declared, the village became wildly excited, because it was known that Quest had tendered his services to the Government. As an ex-Guardsman, and one of the finest riders in England, he had a double claim to the billet he sought, and none was surprised when he was gazetted a colonel of irregular horse. All over England the best men were clamouring to go to the front. Bridget and Daphne remained together at Quest; and Daphne removed her name from the pro-Boer committee of ladies of the Renaissance Club. She never told Bridget that she had received a letter from Cissie St. Cross, herself an American, who wrote as follows:

"I am *horrified* to see your name amongst the Little Englanders! You must join *us*. We are going to equip and send a hospital ship to South Africa. Blood *is* thicker than water—isn't it and I feel that we owe it to the men we love" (Daphne smiled when she read this) "and to *ourselves* to stand by England. I want you to take a stall at the bazaar we are going to give, which will be the smartest thing of the year. I have the bar, and Billy"—Billy was an English Duke—"has promised to be one of the bar-tenders. He says that mixing drinks is *the* thing he knows really well. If you espouse the other side, you might just as well elope with a dentist. I have hung up the Union Jack in my yellow drawing-room. It completely spoils the colour scheme, but—*que veux-tu? À la guerre comme à la guerre!* We all missed you at Ostend. The women who hate you—and, my poor darling, there are lots of them—are gloating over your blunder. . . ."

Next day Daphne sent a letter of resignation to Festus, and at the same time a large cheque to Lady St. Cross. Upon the same day, Guy Fawkes' Day—Bridget had reason to remember the date—a letter came from Arthur. His mission was accomplished; his chiefs wished him to return to England, but he hoped to remain in South Africa for two months more. He was

of opinion that the war would prove a very long and costly affair, and he was desirous, in view of a future settlement, to study at first hand the conditions upon which a lasting peace might be possible. He had not seen Quest, who had landed at Durban, while he (Arthur) was at Cape Town, but he was likely to go to Natal soon, and hoped that he and his cousin might meet.

That afternoon Bridget walked, as usual, down to the village, and her sister accompanied her. Ever since the departure of the Bidgoods and Mapertons a succession of visitors had been coming and going at Quest. Now, at last, the great house was empty. The twins walked swiftly and in silence, oppressed by the dull, lowering skies and the sense of decay which in thickly-wooded countries in November is so disagreeably suggestive. A fine driving wind, which puts life into an autumnal landscape, had died down as the short day drew to its close, and the heavy clouds welded together seemed about to fall for lack of air upon the earth.

"A beastly day," said Daphne, who prided herself upon the use of English adjectives. "It's an outrage that while our husbands are amusing themselves in a land of sunshine we should be forced to stop here."

"Amusing themselves?"

"Yes; I know what I'm saying; and I'm talking to you, my sister. I wouldn't proclaim such opinions from the housetops. They *are* amusing themselves, exciting themselves; it's the same thing."

"To some women, perhaps."

"Pooh! Chips is as jolly as a sandboy, whatever that is; and Arthur is chewing the cud of his gratified ambitions. To both of 'em we are side issues—and you know it. I believe they married us for our money."

"The men we married loved us," said Bridget, with decision.

"Do they act as if they loved us now? I like to tell the truth—sometimes. Chips has no business volunteering when he has a wife and child, not to

mention a big landlord's duties. There are others—plenty of them—to take his place: men with everything to gain and nothing to lose. Arthur may care for you a tiny bit, but Chips loathes me."

"No," said Bridget; "I am sure you are mistaken. He left England because he cared; he has volunteered for the same reason."

Then silence fell again upon them, till they reached a small knoll whence a view of the village could be obtained. The rectory lay at their feet, and beyond it the spire of the church seemed to pierce the leaden skies; to the right and left lay the pretty cottages with their big eaves and gables, and twisted chimney-pots. Bridget gazed first at the spire; then her glance fell upon the Parslows' cottage. Immediately a sharp exclamation dropped from her lips.

"How you startle me!" exclaimed Daphne. "What is the matter?"

She looked crossly into Bridget's face, already pale with fear.

"That cottage," said Bridget, pointing to the right. "I—I believe it is on fire."

CHAPTER XXVII

A BAPTISM OF FIRE

By the time the sisters had reached the village street the Parslow cottage was blazing fiercely. The thatched roof—enormously thick, because new thatch is always laid over old (and this particular cottage had been built at the beginning of the century)—had burst into flame; while the lower rooms as seen through the windows glowed like a furnace. A cordon of villagers stood round the cottage—doomed as they well knew, for a long dry summer had drained the countryside of water, and the small fire-engine, which stood in the stables of Quest, had not even been sent for. Hampshire folk are apathetic; and when it became known that the cottage was untenanted, that no human being's life was in peril, the bystanders settled themselves down to enjoy the spectacle. Pretty, it seemed, had gone with the carrier to Winchester to buy some clothes; Mrs. Parslow and the baby had not returned from their afternoon airing in the Chase. Two or three persons testified that they had seen Mrs. Parslow setting forth with the baby; none had seen her return. Doubtless she was drinking tea with a neighbour.

"Thank God! Thank God!" exclaimed Bridget.

Just then the agent galloped up on his stout cob. He, too, was of opinion that nothing could be done. The house was hermetically sealed, and the fire, smouldering, possibly for some hours, must have consumed the furnishings of the lower rooms before it burst its way out.

The crowd chatted idly. Upon the roof of the

Horse and Bridle stood two men holding buckets of water, ready to extinguish falling sparks. The inn boasted a slate roof; and the stout publican was not concerned about anything except making provision for a consuming thirst upon the part of the spectators, to be slaked at his beer barrels, as soon as the fire had burned itself out. Suddenly the crowd burst into furious and excited speech.

"Look there, *there*!" screamed a shrill voice.

The eyes of those facing the cottage turned with one accord to a common point of interest. At the small window of the bedroom immediately above the blazing porch was a terrible face. It seemed to Bridget, and, doubtless, to many another also, that the awful writing on that livid and distorted countenance could not be misread.

"A ladder! A ladder!" yelled a dozen hoarse voices.

The agent turned to the ladies: "It is too late," he said gravely. "She is palsied by fright. And," he added, more to himself than to Daphne, "she could never squeeze through that window."

"The child," shuddered Bridget. Then she ran forward into the open circle where the sparks were falling like golden rain.

"Five hundred pounds," she called out, "to the man who will save the baby!"

Nobody moved, although a deeper groan burst from the crowd.

"She is drunk," said a man's voice.

The villagers echoed the word, conviction seizing them as the flames illumined the bleared eyes, the red lips set in a ghastly grin.

"She is sober now," said the agent; and as he spoke, intelligence, as it were a spark from the fire, seemed to touch the face. The grin vanished, the pendulous lips closed, into the bleared faded eyes came the light of resolution. A moment later the face disappeared. But it was obvious to the meanest understanding that help could not come to those within from without. No ladder could reach the small casement, because the

square porch was blazing in front of it. The window looked like a blot of ink wreathed with gibbering tongues of fire. Above and on each side the heavy eaves were incandescent with heat. Flesh and blood could never pass through that flaming gate.

"There she is again."

Mrs. Parslow appeared once more at the window, holding up the child swathed in a blanket. It seemed as if she were about to fling it into the roaring furnace below. Then with infinite difficulty she began to squeeze herself through the narrow opening. Once more silence fell upon the crowd. From the edge of the porch the baby could be thrown into outstretched arms. But to reach the edge already crumbling into ashes, the grandmother must allow herself to be burnt alive. Already the flames were licking her arms and face; already the women in the crowd were beginning to scream, to faint, and to run away. Daphne was cowering upon the ground, the agent bending over her; Bridget, divining Mrs. Parslow's intention, had found a large shawl, which she and three men held ready to receive the child. Bridget could just see Mrs. Parslow's face, rigid with resolve. Now and again she tried to beat off the fiery serpents as they darted hungry tongues towards the baby; when they attacked her own face she made no effort to repel them. Very slowly, inch by inch, she squeezed her corpulent body through that dreadful gate. Then, as the shuddering crowd hid its face with one accord, she fell into the furnace below. A second later she stood upright, a blazing figure, and the child was flung into the shawl.

"Jump, jump!" yelled a man.

But Mrs. Parslow had accomplished all earthly tasks. Who shall say that at that supreme moment she was not conscious that she had redeemed the long dreary years of sin and hypocrisy? Who, at least, does not hope that it is so? She stood there for a moment, a shining figure, illumined by flames other than those which were consuming her body. Then she sank down and perished. The Rector raised his hat. He alone

of the men present knew the woman's story, knew what her efforts had been, knew, possibly, that God's will had never been more conspicuously made manifest than in the spectacle of this sinner dying in torment that another might live. And he alone looked steadfastly at her face, purged and purified by flame. He had seen many die: some calmly and trustfully, glad to lay down the burden of years, some in anguish clutching at life, loath to go because they were young and strong, some floating away upon Lethe's sluggish tide, all the senses and faculties steeped in forgetfulness; but he had never seen a death so profoundly expressive as this, nor one which justified so completely his opinions and experience. Those who heard him preach during the following Lent upon the dying thief upon the Cross guessed what had inspired his sermon.

Upon examination little Nancy proved to be but slightly injured, and not at all disfigured. The truth leaked out that night. Mrs. Parslow had returned early, driven home, doubtless, by the impending clouds. The oppression of the atmosphere may have been too much for her resolution, the opportunity—in the absence of Pretty—too irresistible. She bought a bottle of brandy from the Horse and Bridle bar, and probably consumed every drop of it, falling into that drunken stupor, from which Death, with the "tiger roar" of his voice, aroused her.

Bridget broke the news to Pretty on her return from Winchester, and the Rector was also present. Pretty listened to the grim details in silence, hugging her baby to her bosom, the tears trickling down her cheeks. The Rector said afterwards that had the issue been otherwise, had the baby been burned and the mother spared, he would have despaired of her soul. Happily, the wind was tempered to this lamb, whose fleece already had begun to whiten. Before many days had passed the gossips of the village knew that the girl had screened her mother's sin by taking it on herself, and this knowledge warmed their too censorious hearts to forgiveness of the other sin. Pretty was given a cottage at the

north end of the village, and was offered more work than she could undertake.

After Mrs. Parslow's death, Bridget wrote to Max, urging the young man to accept from their father's estate either a certain income or its equivalent in hard cash. After some delay an answer came, gratefully refusing the offer. Daphne had consented to contribute her share. "He can take what he wants, but I don't wish to see him," she observed; "his mother must have been a wicked woman; and if it had not been for him Chips would be here taking care of me." This *post hoc propter hoc* style of argument was becoming familiar to Bridget. She sometimes reflected that the children of pleasure sacrifice to their god almost all the faculties which distinguish men from monkeys, amongst them the sense of humour.

During these dun days she saw Pretty Parslow continuously, but Max's name was seldom mentioned. That the man himself filled the girl's thoughts Bridget could not doubt; for she had begun to educate herself, asking for books, and entreating Bridget to correct her grammar and pronunciation. "I want Nancy to talk like her father," she said one afternoon, and then blushed furiously. She worked so indefatigably that Bridget feared her health might suffer, but both she and the child were growing handsomer and stronger. On Christmas Day the village postman offered Pretty marriage, and when (twenty-four hours later) it became known that she had refused him, the stout, putty-faced publican, arrayed in his best black suit, called at the cottage, thereby whetting to razor-edge the tongues of the gossips. "He told me," said Pretty, relating the story of this wooing to Bridget, "that he was willing to forget and forgive; and I told him that I wasn't quite such a Christian. He sold mother that brandy, and I'd take my affidavit that he suspected she was in the cottage, while he was thinking of nothing except his bar. He asked me to walk with him, and I told him I'd sooner walk with sinners than with such saints as him."

"And if an honourable sinner asked you to walk with him?"

"Never, never, never," exclaimed Pretty vehemently; and Bridget said no more.

Upon New Year's Eve, Miss Parslow was making preparations for the morrow, having bought a tiny fir, which she was engaged in decorating with candles and oranges. Nancy was not yet two years old, but Pretty declared that she was more intelligent than the average country-bred child of four. Nancy, therefore, must have her tree, and Nancy's mother intended to celebrate the New Year in good old-fashioned style. When she had finished her task, she looked at the baby, who was sleeping soundly, swept up the hearth, put some coal on the fire, and sat down to read. It was barely eight o'clock, and the book was interesting, but Pretty's interest in it soon flagged, and presently ceased altogether. She put it aside, and sat still facing the fire, her eyes upon the glowing embers. She was at ease in mind and body—and passionately grateful, with that gratitude which comes slowly to the soul and endures.

It seemed incredible that she had wished to remain in London, when this haven of rest was awaiting her, holding health for her baby, purification for herself—and her mother.

From thoughts of her mother, her mind turned to Max. Where was he? Was it well with him? She reviewed their life together, seeing it with the detachment of one who has changed her point of view. Ever since the news came from California that he was little better than herself, dependent, as she was, upon what he could earn, the child of an adventuress, she had hoped and prayed that he might come back to her. Day by day that hope had waxed feebler. To-night she resolved to live her life without him. Then the woman in her prevailed, and she cried in an agony of supplication:

"O God—give him back to me!"

Within that hour Max was standing before her.

His presence so startled her that she shrank back

with a low cry, as if a spectre were confronting her. And indeed, the appearance of the man, his travel-stained, disordered dress, his white haggard face, his thin hands, betokened shadow rather than substance. For his part he entirely misinterpreted her actions.

"You are comfortable," he said coldly, spreading his hands before the fire. "I am stopping at the Quest Arms."

"Have you had anything to eat?" she asked

"To eat? I did not come here to eat."

He flung himself moodily into a chair, glancing with contracted brows at the dresser with its rows of blue and white plates, the shining kettle on the hob, the square table with its bright cloth, the books, the warm curtains, the red-tiled floor. Bridget had given Pretty most of this furniture, and other neighbours, when they learned her story, had come forward with peace-offerings. But to Max the comfort of the cottage was detestable.

"You came to see the child?" she asked.

"The child?" He stared at her blankly. "Good Lord! I had almost forgotten there was a child. Yes —let me see it. If it's sleeping, for Heaven's sake don't wake it."

He followed her into the bedroom, not unmindful of the finer, fuller curves of her figure. Arcadian life, he reflected, agreed with Pretty Parslow. Well, she had settled down to the enjoyment of bucolic pleasures; she was going to marry, so he had been told at the Quest Arms, a stout publican; in time, doubtless she would grow as stout as he; she would be the mother of half a score of rosy-cheeked boys and girls; she would become a respectable, God-fearing, cheese-paring housewife. And why not?

With these thoughts in his head he bent over the cradle. Pretty held a candle in her hand and watched Max's face. Across it flitted in rapid succession surprise, incredulity, admiration, pride. There are men who can never appreciate babies at all unless they are —asleep. Max was not of their number. He had an artist's passion for movement; and little Nancy with

her cheeks aglow with exercise, her eyes radiant with the joy of life, would have inspired in him a still greater pleasure. But asleep, her charms were nearly as irresistible. Her head, with its delicate features and fine softly-curling hair, was half encircled by a pink dimpled arm. Her lashes lay long and dark upon a cheek whose texture was as the petal of a wood anemone. Her lips, moist and red, revealed the white even teeth which she had inherited from her mother.

"What a beauty!"

"And why shouldn't she be?" murmured Pretty.

Their eyes met across the cot. Max returned to the kitchen. He sat down in the chair by the fire; and Pretty sat down opposite to him. She had often dreamed of this; but the trouble in Max's eyes was like a knife at her heart. And as yet he had not even taken her hand in his.

"I am nobody," he said, after a pause. "My claims were worthless. I told you that if money came my way I would make a proper settlement on you and the child. Well, money is not coming my way."

"Don't worry about that," said Pretty softly.

"I don't—much," he replied curtly. "I have been in Paris since I saw you last; I have been working."

"Too hard," said Pretty.

"Possibly. I have been working at a picture, not at my trade. I had just so much money, and I made it last as long as possible. I have come back to England to make some more."

"Then the picture is finished?"

"The picture is destroyed."

"Oh, Max!"

"I drove my palette knife through it."

"Why, why?"

"Because it was not up to the mark."

"You will try again?"

"That depends."

He fell into silence, gazing at the fire. Pretty remembered that he had once said to her that the ambition of his youth had been this: to paint a great picture.

"What does it depend on?" she asked presently.

He looked up quickly.

"It depends on you. I want you to pose for me. I want your face. I can't explain to you, but nothing else will satisfy me. I had studies; yes, but they were not sufficient. With your help I believe I can do it;" he drew in his breath sharply. "Others—those who know—think so too. My work in London was not thrown away. And now——" he broke off with a slight French gesture, "you will refuse, of course. You are," he glanced again at the dresser, "respectable."

No taunt, no sneer was implied. The artist understood all that the word "respectable" includes, especially to a woman. Pretty's expression changed. That was what he wanted—her face! He had taken a long journey to ask her to *pose*!

"I can't do it," she cried passionately, "I can't, I won't."

"I know you won't," he replied. "I was a fool to ask it, perhaps a knave, but—no matter."

His ready acquiescence cooled her hot protest.

"It does matter," she said quickly. "I'll do it."

"But," he hesitated, "I had not expected to find you like this. What will the good people say?"

"The good people," she replied, "will mind their own business, and the others I don't care a snap for. I'll pose for you when and where you like."

"No, no; it is impossible."

Her unselfishness stirred all that was best in him. He rose resolutely.

"You always were the right sort," he said hurriedly, "one of the best. I've heard what you did here, hiding your mother's sin by taking it on yourself. They speak well of you, your future is assured, and God knows that I of all men hope that it may be happy. Goodbye, Pretty, I won't rob you of the peace you have earned."

He held out his hand, which she took in hers.

"Max," she said hurriedly, "before we part I must tell you something."

She paused, and he supposed she was about to speak of her approaching marriage.

"I know, I know. I don't blame you, dear; a woman can't live alone."

"Eh?"

"They told me the village talk."

Pretty understood and laughed, blushing because Max had thought it possible that she could marry such a man as the publican.

"He is rich," she murmured bashfully.

"I daresay."

"He takes the Communion upon the first Sunday of every month."

"Does he?"

"He's a widower; he says he'll be very kind to me."

"And you'll be very kind to him."

"Shall I?" retorted Pretty fiercely. "What? you, you think I could live with him, that fat, white maggot of a man, who sold mother brandy? I—I wouldn't marry him if he held the gold of this world in one hand and the glory of the next in the other. I shan't marry —not I! But, Max, I can't let you go without telling you the truth. When you went away in London, last time, you said a cruel thing—do you remember?—that I never loved you, that I had always loved some one else. Ah, that cut! Because I thought I'd shown so plain that I'd learned to care for you—only for you. You were kind to me; and you don't know—how could you know?—what that means to girls like me. And when the end came, when you left me," her voice began to sob in her throat, "I did not blame you. Mother was enough to drive any man from his home, and it was always understood that you was free to go or to stay —as you pleased. And now if I can help you to paint a picture, let me do it, for old sake's sake, let me do it, Max, let me do it!"

"You love me," he said slowly, incredulously.

She covered her face with a pair of trembling hands, the very sight of which brought back memories too poignant to be described.

"And, by Heaven, I love you!" he cried passionately. "I had to leave you to find out what manner of woman

you are. And that night I came to ask you to forgive me, because I knew that I had played the cur, and the cad, and the fool. And I misunderstood you then as I had misunderstood you before. Then I went to France to paint, and to forget, if I could, the past, to drown it in work. And I found I could work, that my fingers had gained the skill they had lacked before. And I know now, I know I say, that I can paint a picture which the world will look at; but I want more than your face, I want you altogether, to be my wife. What I have learned that is of value I owe to you. Yes, yes, let me speak. The qualities which are lacking in me you have got—patience, fortitude, unselfishness. Share these with me, Pretty, or I am undone. Let us go to France, to California, where you will, provided we are together, but believe me, if I care for my art, I care infinitely more for you. With you, painting ceilings at four pounds a week, I shall count myself blessed; without you, even if fame comes to me, I shall be—d——d!"

Then he opened his arms and took her to his heart, as a man takes the woman he loves, for better for worse, in sickness and in health, till death them do part.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHICH CONTAINS THE UNEXPECTED

DESPITE (perhaps because of) the protests of the Dowager, Daphne insisted on buying a motor, which duly arrived from Paris about Christmas-time, accompanied by its *chauffeur*; and for many days the ladies of Quest might be seen rushing about the peaceful roads of Hampshire at a rate of speed forbidden by man but highly commended by women. "With this darling thing," declared Daphne, "it *is* possible to leave one's cares behind one."

"It is certainly rapid," said the Dowager primly. She refused to accompany the twins on their expeditions, because in her heart she thought horseless carriages improper.

"I loathe everything slow," retorted Daphne, "except sloe gin."

At the end of three weeks, however, the long excursions became monotonous. Bridget was reconciled to them, because they meant plenty of fresh air for Daphne, who during December had spent most of her days on a sofa in a room much too hot for health. She told herself that the sharp air and exhilarating speed would put to flight those morbid fancies which discoloured so many of her twin's waking hours; and for a season the pendulum swung the other way, and Daphne's high spirits, Daphne's laughter, Daphne's irrepressible activity distressed the Dowager as much as Daphne's "vapours" had done. "It is her duty," said this excellent woman, "to think of the wife of the Head of the House."

"She talks of the House," said Daphne, "as if we were Hohenzollerns; and she believes Chips to be the Lord's anointed."

"The more I see of her the more I like her," replied Bridget warmly. "We have often laughed at her, but she worked, and pinched, and did hateful things because she does have a real love of Quest; and a real love for anything, even stones and mortar, is not to be despised."

"Chips ought to have married you," said Daphne sourly.

During January Paul Festus came to grief. His work with and for the Little Englanders brought its reward in the shape of a strongly-worded request to stand for a small constituency in the North, famous in Parliamentary annals for its ultra-Radical yet sentimental representatives. The papers printed this request, commenting upon the curious fact that at such a time any body of men could be found in the kingdom who wished to exalt one who, by word and pen, had made himself the enemy of all that England stands for—a man who boasted that he was in correspondence with Leyds and Steyn; to whom, it was hinted, Krüger himself had personally acknowledged the obligations of the Transvaal Republic. Miss Bosman read this paragraph, realising that silence concerning the doctor's past would be misdemeanour, if not high treason, on her part. The spinster was intensely patriotic, for her father's fortune had been made by supplying Her Majesty's forces with certain groceries and articles of clothing; and she justly observed to her most intimate friends that her papa's *genius* as a provider had indirectly brought about more than one glorious victory, for Thomas Atkins cannot sustain the traditions of the British soldier unless he be properly clothed and fed. Since the outbreak of the war Miss Bosman had laboured strenuously on behalf of the Absent-minded Beggar, and the traitorous attitude of Festus and his friends (particularly his friends) had distressed her honest soul.

That Festus should be "exalted" was unthinkable, unless such exalting were done at the hands of the common hangman; and so it came to pass that the apostle's record was placed in the hands of a great editor, a friend of the spinster (who, moreover, had a small account of his own with the sinless one), and within two days the British public learned with amazement that Paul Orpin, *alias* Festus, had been convicted of obtaining money under false pretences in Denver, Colorado; that he had served his "time" for a somewhat similar offence in New York; and that he was "wanted"—as the phrase humorously runs—in a City of Mexico, in Lima, and in other places too numerous to mention. It is true that Festus repudiated any connection with the impostor Orpin, that he set forth in impassioned prose a pedigree which plainly proved that as a writer of fiction he would have made his mark. Still, the British public was not to be budged from the conviction that it had been fooled, and the committee of the little northern burgh accepted without comment or protest their candidate's letter of resignation.

Festus, like the great man he was, made up his mind immediately to seek other pastures—not so green, perhaps, as the meads of England, yet capable of affording nourishment to one who took the world as he found it, and could eat hay if corn were not to be procured. In fine, he decided to go to Paris, where the Exhibition was likely to attract hordes of people, some of whom, doubtless, would be better provided with money than brains.

But before he shook from his shoes the dust of an ungrateful country, he swore to himself that he must see Daphne. She consented to meet him at Salisbury. Her *chauffeur* and she could leave Quest after breakfast and reach Salisbury—where she was unknown—in time for luncheon. Festus would be weird and amusing as usual, and she would return home before it was dark. So she made her plans, and communicated them to the apostle, who placed his own interpretation upon her willingness to meet him.

Upon the appointed day, the journey to Salisbury was accomplished without difficulty and without arousing any suspicion on the part of Bridget and the Dowager other than a mild curiosity in regard to the whim which had inspired an interest in architecture. "I adore cathedrals," Daphne said. At Salisbury she left the motor at one of the inns, instructing its engineer to return alone to Quest, after he had eaten his dinner. She proposed to travel by train, having ordered the carriage to meet her at Eastleigh. Then she strolled into the Close, where the apostle was found, seemingly engaged in deciphering one of the time-worn Latin inscriptions on the tombstones. His surprise at meeting unexpectedly an old friend was so admirably sustained that Daphne withdrew a half-baked resolution to lunch by herself. Fear of being detected had caught her by the throat. At the sound of Festus' smooth persuasive tones, all scruples vanished.

"How is the apostle?" she said gaily.

"He is now apostle and martyr," Festus replied.

"Can you not see me in Paris, the victim of *perfide Albion*, the man who was driven from England by a brutal Press because he upheld justice and the brotherhood of man?"

He laughed cheerily.

"Who gave you away?" murmured Daphne.

"The Bosman."

He frowned angrily, unconsciously clenching his fist. He was thinking, not of his lost Matilda, but of Quest.

"You do not look very—*nice*, when you are angry," said Daphne, eyeing him apprehensively.

"Nice?" He laughed again, not so cheerily. "No, I should not describe myself as particularly—nice, *ma belle dame*, except in the choice of my adjectives."

"Nice is a word I loathe," said Daphne. "I used it on purpose to draw you. Let us go and have lunch. I have discovered a charming inn, and I'm ravenous."

She adjusted her veil; and together they strolled through the Close and on into the town.

At lunch, Festus proved as "weird" and amusing as usual; and although the meat consisted of oysters, and the drink was porter, the meal was pronounced a success.

"You look remarkably well," Festus had observed when Daphne removed her veil. Daphne hastened to say that she had passed a wretched November and December.

"My motor made a new woman of me," she declared. "I must have—movement. I could have gone to Monte Carlo, of course, but there would have been a ghastly row, and I hate rows. I like to please people."

"Poor Mousie!" said Festus.

"Now, this little adventure will give me a fillip for a week. It has been so exciting plotting and planning for it Quest would be crazy with rage if he knew of it."

Festus smiled grimly.

"Tell me," he said gravely, "what is Quest, the man, not the peer, to his wife? I have been frank with you. Be frank with me."

Daphne hesitated, but the wonderful eyes of the apostle were on hers. Dare she tell the truth? Could she let herself go for once? The delights of throwing to the wind the rags of restraint proved irresistible.

"I hate him," she replied quickly. "Because he has been so disagreeable, because he has dared to—to punish *me*, as if I were some milk-and-water Englishwoman. And—I may as well tell you everything—he cares for my twin, who is *good*, you understand. It's easy for her to be good, as easy as it is for me to be the other thing. And some men worship that kind of woman. Quest is one of them. He has had lively times himself, but when he married me he thought he would settle down to a Darby and Joan life, be the model landlord, go to sleep after dinner, and, in short, study the arts of pleasing himself instead of pleasing me. American women, as you know, are not built for that sort of heads-I-win-tails-you-lose game, particularly when they have money of their own settled on themselves. I did care for him—once; and," she

added quickly, "I should be sorry if anything happened to him in South Africa. Ah! What a hideous thing death is, isn't it? But I care for him no longer. He bores me; he exasperates me. I always think of him now as a big boy in hobnailed boots trampling upon my toes."

She was sitting opposite to Festus, near the fire; and both were smoking; when she spoke of her feet, she coquettishly lifted her trim skirt, revealing the daintiest pair of shoes in the world.

"I can see him," said Festus. "You needn't say another word."

"You satisfactory man!"

Festus sipped his coffee and smoked his cigar.

"It has been a horrid winter," continued Daphne with an expressive shiver.

"Spring is coming, *ma belle dame*."

"For you—in Paris. Perhaps. For me—I am not so sure. When Quest comes back I shall be kissed and forgiven, I daresay, but, all the same, I shall have to be careful."

She glanced at him, demurely smiling, relishing the fascination she exercised over this reckless actor who had played so many parts, but who never acted before her. She could see that he was moved, and this sense of power was so enchanting that she added softly: "You can read me like a letter."

"You are a letter," said Festus quickly, "a love-letter, and to read you is a delight. Yes; your message to the world is love, and I—I—what is the matter?"

Daphne had raised her hand in protest. The man's manner could not be mistaken.

"Hold your tongue!" she exclaimed sharply. "Are you mad?"

He controlled himself. "I beg your pardon—you are not a love-letter."

His face was as white as hers. Love? Why, the woman was a sham, a puppet, a doll stuffed with sawdust.

"May I ask you a few questions, Lady Quest?"

"Let them be few," she replied nervously, for his expression frightened her. He was a beast, she was reflecting. She had been nice to him, sorry for him, and this was her reward.

"Do you know what my friendship for you has cost me? Let me answer my own questions. In hard cash about one hundred and fifty thousand pounds; yes, my innocent white dove, that was what I paid for the privilege of knowing you. What else? The devotion of a woman. What else? My social and literary ambitions. What else? A seat in Parliament. The loss of these good things I owe directly and indirectly to you."

If the apostle put the case strongly, the kind reader will make allowance for him.

"You insult me," said Daphne, rising.

"I can't insult *you*," said Festus. "Sit down, sit down, I say, unless you want me to finish this talk in the streets of Salisbury. You have played with me, and now it is my turn. I have nothing left to lose. Nothing! But you—ah, that hurts—you have everything at stake."

Daphne sank back into her chair; the waters seemed to be closing over her.

"I am going to play with you, my poor little Mouse," he continued, changing his tone; "I am going to amuse myself—as you have done."

He took out his cigar-case, carefully snipped off the end of the cigar he selected, and lit it. The slow deliberation of this simple action was torment to the woman watching him.

"You had better smoke too," he observed. "It will soothe you."

But instead she began to cry, helplessly, as a baby cries. Festus frowned.

"Come, come," he said sharply. "I gave you credit for more grit. Tears will not melt my resolution."

"What do you want?" she sobbed "Money, I suppose. Well, let me pay your bill, and go."

His eyes hardened. "You rich women think that money can settle all scores. I don't want your money."

He puffed contentedly at his cigar, while she dried her eyes.

"What do you want?" she repeated sullenly.

"Shall we lump my wants in one word, Lady Quest, and call it—revenge? Husband and wife are one—or they ought to be—so, in settling with you, I shall also square accounts with Quest." He laughed grimly, thinking of that burly nobleman seven thousand miles away. "With Quest, who can hit hard. I can hit hard too, when I am driven to the wall. You have cornered me. Why did you come to Salisbury? Let me tell you. You wanted excitement. Well, you shall have it, plenty of it," and he laughed again.

Daphne shut her eyes. For the first time her folly began to assume monumental proportions. It hemmed her in on all sides; escape was impossible.

"You can take a nap if you like," she heard Festus say; "you have plenty of time."

"You propose to keep me a prisoner here?"

"In effect, yes. You wanted a certain game without the name; well, you shall have the name without the game. You follow me—eh? We engaged a private room. When the waiter with the coffee came, I gave him half a sovereign, and told him I would ring if I wanted anything. He had the impudence to wink. I don't think we shall be disturbed."

"You never cared for me, or you would not treat me so—brutally," she murmured.

"If all be fair in love or war, all must be doubly fair when love and war march side by side."

"You ought to have been a great man," she sneered.

"Perhaps," said Festus. The words rankled, because he was sensible that he had made the worst use possible of many talents. "Come—I see you are prepared to make *bonne mine à mauvais jeu*. Let me offer you a cigarette and one more glass of liqueur."

He poured out some Benedictine, which she drank. Then, just as he had expected, she laughed.

"You *do* get your own way."

"Generally," he replied gravely.

"Be generous! Open that door, and let me go."

"No."

She walked to the window and looked out upon the sleepy old town lying so snug around the glorious cathedral. Festus crossed the room and stood beside her.

"Fair to the eye," he whispered. "The cathedral and its traditions dominating the town outwardly, but if we could enter those houses and interpret the writing on the walls, the secret history, what should we find?"

"Something shocking, no doubt."

"Nothing is shocking to the philosophic mind," said the apostle softly. "What we see before us is an epitome of society, as we know it, snugly dozing beneath the shelter of that ancient institution we call convention. Only a fool or a madman would disturb such peace. And besides," he added in a different tone, "the window is far from the street. You might sprain an ankle or break your leg. You are wise to look before you leap."

He had followed her thoughts so easily that she began to tremble.

"I have always been straight," she faltered. "A few harmless flirtations."

"*Straight!* The French have a name for such as you, *ma belle dame.* Straight? Great Scott! Why are not children taught the proper use of words? You are no more straight than I. We are two of a kind, my little Mousie, rodents both of us, who nibble at others' cheeses—in the dark. And sooner or later, rats and mice—I am a rat—get caught."

A sudden roar, as of thunder, made the inn rock and reverberate. Daphne, terrified by the unexpected noise, almost fell into the apostle's arms.

"It is only the train," he said, in a softened whisper. "The London express, bringing the news of the world to Sleepy Hollow."

"I thought it was the crack of doom," said Daphne, half laughing, half crying. "Please open the window. I—I promise not to jump. I will keep quiet."

Festus opened the window, which overlooked one of the streets leading to the station. A small balcony overhung the narrow pavement whereon a few foot passengers, country folk for the most part, leisurely ambled. Daphne gazed at their red stolid faces, and envied them. Across the street a maid-servant, the overworked slavey of the lower middle class, was scrubbing a window, singing as she scrubbed. And then, while Daphne was thinking of Quest, lying cool and secure in the midst of its broad moat, her ear caught the familiar bubbling grunt of an approaching motor. Her own machine was coming down the street driven by the smirking Frenchman, conscious that he was the cynosure of every eye. Her quick wits realised that here was an opportunity ripe for the plucking. If she called him, he would stop; she could say that she had changed her mind, that she would return by road. Festus, watching her, saw the impulse come and go as the motor passed. How weak she was, he reflected, and how lovely! She shivered as the link between herself and home rumbled on and out of sight.

"You are cold," said Festus. "Let me shut the window."

"No, no," she pleaded; "give me a little more—air."

"As you will," he replied.

Many tradesmen had come to the doors of their shops to see the motor, and they lingered on their thresholds because a couple of urchins were running down the street, shouting out the war news and waving the special editions they were offering for sale. Daphne's thoughts flew to South Africa. Why was not Chips here, with his strong arm round her? After all, he was to blame, not she. Her anger against him grew by what it fed on, purging her conscience, redeeming self-respect and vanity. He, her husband, relieved her of that mischievous gift of the gods, responsibility. So warped was her mind that she began to compare and contrast the two men, Festus and Quest, to the advantage of the apostle. He, at least, had made sacrifices on her behalf, had proved that she was more to him than all the

other things which men hold dear. She turned to him, smiling, and then shrank back, appalled at the expression on his face.

"Listen!" he said hoarsely.

He pointed to the street. Above the sounds of the quiet thoroughfare floated the shrill cries of the boys coming nearer and nearer.

"They are screaming out something about—us," she faltered.

Festus could see that she had not understood, that her ears were not such faithful servants as his. He slammed the window, and led her to the sofa.

"Your husband," he said slowly, "is dead."

CHAPTER XXIX

RECONSTRUCTION

FESTUS himself was so confounded by this catastrophe that for a time he was hardly able to realise the effect of it on his companion. She lay insensible, upon the sofa, deaf and dumb beneath the scourge of God. Festus paced the dingy room, with its stale suggestiveness of merry-making, trying to collect his thoughts, piecing together some plan which would meet the emergency. His revenge had been exercised, and what was best in him groaned and travailed. He glanced at his watch. Her train would leave Salisbury in two hours. Obviously she was not physically fit to travel alone; and he could not be seen in her company. He, at any rate, must leave her at once and for ever.

When she recovered consciousness, he told her what must be done; she could choose between facing the journey home alone, or sending for Bridget.

"I will go home," she said feebly.

But when she tried to struggle to her feet, her strength failed, and she fell back.

"I must remain here," she whispered. "Send for Bridget."

"Not here," he replied quickly. "You must drive to another inn. I will get a carriage. You can trust me. Lie still."

He hurried from the room, welcoming action. At the bar he paid the bill. Everybody in the inn seemed to be talking of poor Quest. "It's the best as goes," said the barmaid, little thinking what a poignant truth her words held for the tall, distinguished-looking stranger.

Festus was not yet decided as to the best means of getting Daphne to another hotel without exciting gossip. Finally, he walked down the street, ordered a fly at a livery stable, and instructed the driver to pick up a lady at a linendraper's not too far from the inn where they had lunched. By making a strenuous effort, Daphne walked to the shop, and parted from Festus at the door.

"Good-bye," he said gravely. "We shall not meet again."

As she moved helplessly away from him, he realised the irony of the situation. Now, when she needed him, he must forsake her. He waited at a corner till he saw her enter the fly; then he walked swiftly to the railway station.

At the hotel, Daphne told part of her story to a chubby-cheeked, sympathetic landlady.

"I am Lady Quest," she said. "I have just learned that my husband is dead. Will you help me to bed, and send to Quest for my sister, Mrs. Arthur Wyndquest?"

The landlady burst into tears.

"You are kind," said Daphne. "And you will understand that I do not wish my story to be told at the bars and in the streets. Silence, please!"

She repeated, like a child, what Festus had told her to say; then she fainted. The landlady sent an ostler hot-foot for a doctor, then she telegraphed to Bridget.

Next day the news was confirmed, and details were published. The second forward movement for the relief of Ladysmith had begun, and Quest's regiment of Mounted Rifles was ordered to advance on Colenso as if an attack in force were intended, for bodies of Boers had been seen leaving the trenches, doubtless to reinforce their troops around Ladysmith. Accordingly a force of cavalry, artillery, and infantry was despatched towards the Tugela. The Boers spared their powder till Quest's troopers were within easy range; then fire was opened. Quest was one of the first to fall, shot in three places. A trooper who was close to him at

the time testified that his colonel turned to him as if on parade. "I'm done," he said quietly, and then he crashed from the saddle on to the ground—dead.

The death of Quest made a profound impression in Wessex, where he was so well known. To some of the villagers it seemed incredible that he should be taken when ne'er-do-well boys from adjoining hamlets were left. The unhappy mother was also of this opinion. She had loved her son as man; she had loved him more as the head of his House—that House for which she had worked so faithfully. And now the title and estates had passed into Arthur Wyndquest's keeping. So she refused to be comforted, refused to see the Rector, refused to go to church. She turned her head to that stone wall which she had built—the wall of prosperity, pride, and self-glorification—and wept bitterly. Perhaps those tears sapped the foundations of the wall. Who can say? When the Dowager took up the common round of life, her friends said that she was a broken woman; but if she attempted less, she accomplished more, as the people of Quest bear witness "My lady," observed the postmistress, "used to be wonnerful peevish if us wer'n't to 'er mind, as if 'twere to be expected that common folks could be as virtuous as the quality, now, pore dear sorrowin' mother, she makes 'er mind like fit us who are human bein's, though we do act sometimes like the beasts o' the field!"

Bridget, meantime, was at Salisbury, where for nearly a month Daphne lay at the point of death, stricken down by brain fever. She had received a brief letter from Arthur saying that he was returning to England at once. He had not been allowed to bring home the body of his cousin; so Quest was buried in a soldier's grave by the side of comrades who had followed him across many a stream, and at the last went with him over that dark river which flows for ever between us and so many well-beloved souls. "Let me die," he had often said, "quickly, astride a gallant horse, with a friend at my side."

When Daphne was strong enough to travel she came back to Quest, white as the snowdrops which had begun to force their way through the cold frost-bound earth. She never spoke of her husband, but for the first time in her life took pleasure in the society and care of little Betty. Her extraordinary vitality and craving for excitement seemed to have perished. Bridget could not tell whether she were mourning for her husband or for herself. "I fear," said the famous specialist whom Bridget consulted, "that your sister may die as you say her mother died, of sheer listlessness and mental anæmia. Her interest in the little girl is our only encouraging sign." One afternoon, on the eve of Arthur's arrival, she said, feebly:

"I wish to speak to Arthur before you see him. Let me give him my story first."

Finally Bridget consented to this.

"When he sees me now," said Daphne, "he will be thankful indeed that he didn't marry such a scarecrow."

Accordingly, when Arthur arrived at Quest, he was met by Daphne, whom he recognised only from her weeds.

"Where is Bridget?" he asked quickly.

Daphne led him into the library. She told her story in the rambling, invertebrate manner which indicated more than anything else how greatly she had changed. Arthur was sensible that interruption would distress and disturb her; and from long habit his face, when listening, grew impassive, so that Daphne, glancing at his features, feared that his heart was hardening even as his face. When she had finished, she said querulously: "You *must* forgive her."

"Forgive her?" Arthur smiled hesitatingly. "Will she forgive me?"

"She is waiting for you in the next room."

Towards the end of the following season Lord Maperton met Mrs. Cornelius Sparling at the dinner-table of a common friend. He expressed himself as

jubilant over the vindication of Mr. Chamberlain's foreign policy, although he admitted ruefully that the cloud in the Far East was giving his colleagues some sleepless nights. Mrs. Corny listened politely, interested rather in the speaker than his subject. Politicians, great and small, she mistrusted, seeing the fly of self in the amber of their altruism. There were public men, no doubt, who laboured indefatigably in the interest of others, but she had not met many of them.

"Have you seen the Quests?" she asked presently.

Lord Maperton frowned.

"They have disappointed me—bitterly," he said slowly. "Arthur I regarded as a son, as my pupil," Mrs. Corny hid a smile in a glass of champagne, "and my successor. He has great talents, and an amazing capacity for work, but too much temperament. As a writer he was, of course, a one-book man. He put his heart and soul into *The Samaritans*, and people bought it because——"

"They so seldom see either," interrupted Mrs. Corny.

"Quite so. Then came his lectures and his work in Stepney, which were stepping-stones—nothing more, dear lady,—stepping-stones to the House of Commons. There he found himself."

"I thought you found him."

"You must have your joke. He made his mark immediately, because he always knew what he was talking about, although he sometimes forgot whom he was talking to. You take me—eh? A lack of—er—adaptability. Well, now, what do you think he has done?"

"I am simply crazy for you to tell me."

"He has thrown *us* overboard. He means to give half his working hours to Quest, and the other half to Stepney or Poplar, or some other God-forsaken place. And the sort of work he has undertaken will not even keep him in the public eye. He, a peer of the realm, has actually accepted a seat on some Board of Guardians, whose chairman, I believe, is a pork butcher. He says that the average Guardian has no

time to do his work properly. He proposes to act as the drag upon this wretched four-wheeler, to see—as he puts it—that the charity of the poor for the poor is not misdirected. Can you conceive of such a man undertaking such work? And his wife"—Lord Maperton was growing very warm—"his wife goes with him, a woman qualified to adorn any position; a woman who might prove of value to us. You must really pardon me; I cannot speak temperately on so sore a subject."

"Surely you, as a philanthropist, approve their conduct?"

"My dear lady!"

"I'm a foreigner," said Mrs. Corny, "but in my humble opinion England has more to fear from within than without. You have nearly a million people in London alone living under conditions which are a disgrace to Christianity and civilisation. Much has been done, I am aware, to ameliorate their unhappy lot, but the best blood in England is not too good for such work. Chips lost his life fighting the Boers, and the nation gives him the credit he deserves. Arthur will get no credit, but he is undertaking a greater and more difficult task."

"He need not have left the world," said Maperton stiffly.

"The world! Is there only one world, Lord Maperton? We are told that it takes many men to make a world, but how many worlds does it take to make a—man?"

THE END

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